The Debate: Simplicity vs. Duplicity • Nuclear Enthusiasm

*Morton Kondracke* *Tad Szulc*

# THE NEW REPUBLIC

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## Do You Know Me?

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James Atlas on the Birth of the Beats • Daniel Aaron on John Dos Passos

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# TRB

from Washington
November 8, 1980

## Not-so-great Expectations

Last week was the final week of the election. For the politicians there was ultimate frenzy and even for many of the voters there was rising excitement. The dreary two-year campaign became airborne in the seven-day climax between the debate and the vote. Undecideds fluttered off the trees like falling leaves. Millions of people subconsciously decided that it might be worthwhile going to the polls after all. Last Tuesday they turned on their television sets and watched Carter and Reagan face to face. It was a splendid show. It is the spectacle that up in Ottawa, for example, or out in the parliament of little Barbados or India or Scandinavia is taken for granted: the prime minister on one side of the aisle, the opposition leader on the other, with their respective followers behind them, trading questions and answers and dignified insults. It is a wonderfully vitalizing process for a democracy. The United States, I believe, is the only modern industrialized democracy that doesn't have it. Pity.

We thought both men did well. They are not the silly clowns of the caricaturists. They behaved with dignity and with amazing facility for argument and detail in view of the extraordinary strain they were under. After all the conventional toothy cartoons, it was almost a shock to see Carter in real life, speaking easily and fluently, nobody's fool. Reagan too, certainly made friends with his affable personality, quizzical grin, and refusal to lose his temper as he responded to Carter's jabs. "That's just not true," he kept saying.

Reagan's most effective thrust was in his closing three minutes when he asked America if it were as well off as four years ago, and whether it thought the country was as well respected abroad as when Carter took over. The economy has always been Reagan's strongest argument. If he could have kept the debate to that in the last two months the race would not be so close at the finish. Reagan voiced the classic difference, too, between the two political approaches (so far as parties mean anything anymore) when at the end he called for a crusade "to take government off the backs of the people—and leave you free again!" That was the old clarion call for free enterprise.

It was a little awkward for free enterprise, though, that on the day of Reagan's speech the Ford Motor Company announced a third-quarter loss of $595 million, the second largest in US history, surpassing even GM's $567 million. It put into figures the greatest corporate blunder in free enterprise history: the failure to appreciate the seriousness of the oil shortage, and abandon gas guzzlers in time, a mistake that led the despised big government to bail out Chrysler, and brought pressure from Detroit for trade restrictions.

It may be prejudice, but TRB thought Carter had rather the better of the 1980 debate, recalling statements from Reagan's wilder days of corporate advocacy, tending to put him on the defensive, and pulling rank by frequently referring to the burden of the Oval Office and the issue of peace and war. Both men were nimble at ducking questions, or answering one question when another had been asked. There were no embarrassing gaffes, both speakers pointed out yawning weaknesses in the other's position, and the public was well served, we thought, by seeing the stark differences between them, as, for example, on the nuclear arms race, which comes down to trying to get the Senate to ratify the pending SALT II.

The SALT debate underlines (and exaggerates) the random American system of government. Election or not, Congress reassembles here November 12, lame ducks and all, and will legislate for two months. Jimmy Carter (re-elected or not) may submit the SALT treaty again. Out of a congressional membership of 535 (Senate and House combined), 34 senators have veto power over SALT, an instrument that may or may not keep nuclear arms control discussion alive. Reagan would scrap it at once. Carter must know its chances are slim. Exactly 60 years ago the Senate rejected the League of Nations treaty because of the same constitutional hurdle.

There are vetoes all over Washington, though they're not in the Constitution—vetoes in agencies, bureaus, congressional subcommittees, all waiting for the next president. In a time of accelerating problems the process of selecting the president, the discipline of congressional leadership, and the discipline of the political parties all are weakening. It's a quiet crisis but it's there; every book that comes over my desk dwells on it. British observer Godfrey Hodgson, in his excellent study of the presidency, *All Things to All Men* (Simon & Schuster), notes the "paradox of the presidency: Never has so powerful a leader been so impotent to do what he wants to do, what he is pledged to do, what he is expected to do, and what he knows he must do." There is a pathetic notion among voters that the new president will go to Washington, knock heads together, and make the system work. It is faith in an "outsider." By contrast to Carter and Reagan, since 1945 the average apprenticeship of newly installed British prime ministers has been 28 years; it took Winston Churchill 40 years to rise to the top. American voters ought to understand, particularly before an election, that their expectation of presidential power, as now exercised, is grossly exaggerated. America isn't helpless in this. A lot of proposals have been offered to tighten up our 200-year-old ship of government. In the meantime, however, even an energetic president finds himself thwarted: he must form a new coalition for every bill he submits. It's as though General Grant had to form a new army after every battle. There have been nominal Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress in all but four years since 1931 and there almost certainly will be for the next two years. So what? Harry Truman, for example, tried to get national health insurance enacted. All other modern nations have it; Congress still hasn't acted. Congress held up an energy program for seven years under three presidents.

We thought about that as we watched the debate last week. If Carter wins he'll be a lame duck president with reduced authority. If Reagan wins he'll face a Democratic Congress, and his age makes him a probable lame duck, too. Don't despair. America's sailing ship will make port if it has favorable winds. But don't overestimate the powers of the skipper.



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# Correspondence

## Military overkill

*To the editors:*

While Jimmy Carter has expressed much skepticism about Ronald Reagan's ability to fund his programs, I keep wondering how the president himself, in light of already predicted budget deficits of $64 billion in fiscal 1980 and $45 billion in 1981, with only token million dollar appropriations included in this election year for his already implemented arsenal of new MX mobile missiles ($45 billion); new air- and sea-launched cruises ($35 billion); 572 shiny new nuclear missiles for deployment in a reluctant Europe ($25 billion); new complex "invisible bombers" (at least $50 billion); resurrection of nerve gas and chemical warfare production ($10 billion); various additional AWACs, nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, 12 new Aegis missile class nuclear cruisers, 40 spanking new Trident II missile subs, and the new 100,000 man "Rapid Deployment Force" ($55 billion); plus annual four and five billion dollar increments to military pay and pensions to keep the "voluntary army" content—all of which, if Pentagon cost estimates of the past are any guide, will at least triple in cost—plans to raise the scratch to reduce taxes by $29 billion and fund his social programs at the same or higher levels, and then balance *his* budget as promised since 1975. And, for that matter, why would Reagan or the most bloodthirsty John Bircher want to enlarge upon this surfeit of overkill, and where could they find the wherewithal to embellish it with a single bazooka?

*Courtland Kelsey*
*East Orange, New Jersey*

## In the slanderous tradition

*To the editors:*

I, my wife, and at least five of my department colleagues were disgusted by the John Lukacs review of William A. Williams's *Empire as a Way of Life* in the October 11 issue of *The New Republic*. We wonder about the influence on undergraduates of a man capable of writing with such violence and hatred. We regret that Lukacs should continue in the slanderous tradition of other reviewers in the past 25 years who have refused to deal with Williams's arguments but have instead resorted to ridicule and insult. How unscholarly. How anti-intellectual. What poverty of thought. What fear of dissent and challenge. What blindness to good ideas. Of course, Lukacs went beyond the bounds of normal, run-of-the-mill slander. In addition, he exploited Williams's candor and openness without telling us about his own biases. He insulted the Organization of American Historians for electing Williams to its presidency.

*Jeffrey Kimball*
*Miami University*
*Oxford, Ohio*

## Stop signs

*To the editors:*

I am stirred and indignant over TRB's reference to "motorists who don't bother to stop at stop signs" as an analogy by which we condemn those who do not heed the warnings of political forecasters (*TNR*, October 18). The problems with the electoral college are points well taken. Stop signs are another matter.

The proliferation of stop signs on the roads of this country is the greatest threat to our freedom since the Battle of New Orleans. I don't mean stop signs at intersections: we all recognize the need for order in our various interactions. I speak of the so-called "slowdown" stop signs: those placed hither and thither on suburban roads to keep motorists from exceeding the speed limit. This is a blatant misuse of the stop sign and one which no conscientious citizen will heed.

In the great tradition of Henry David Thoreau and Martin Luther King Jr., we must not yield to the arbitrary use of government power in any form. TRB owes an apology to those who are silently and civilly fighting this tendency toward tyranny in the halls of the traffic commission.

*Joseph R. Urgo*
*Middletown, Connecticut*

## Example of disarray

*To the editors:*

I commend *TNR* for Alfred Kazin's essay on the decline in American writing ("American Writing Now," *TNR*, October 18). I also commend you for printing an excellent example of the disarray in literary culture in the same issue. In his exuberance over John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, Martin Bauml Duberman tells us that "Boswell's scalpel" reveals Aquinas to be a "harassed journeyman" and not a thorough thinker at all. After this remarkable and bold claim Duberman then admits that he really doesn't know that much about medieval studies. Apparently such knowledge is not necessary in order to dismiss Aquinas. To top it off we are told that Boswell's writing is so encompassing that there is probably no scholar alive who can give us an authoritative criticism. Not only is Boswell smarter than Thomas Aquinas, he is the smartest man in the world.

Surely this is what Kazin has in mind when he refers to "the evaporation of history."

*Michael G. Cannon*
*Wayne, Pennsylvania*

## Latin American novels?

*To the editors:*

William Gass's oblique look at recent Spanish-speaking novelists is self-indulgent, superficial, and largely irrelevant ("A Fiesta for the Form," *TNR*, October 25). Words, words, words—without form—falling over one another in a futile search for a meaningful idea or insight. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* does not evoke a "nostalgia for old forms and functions of the novel"; it shatters comfortable assumptions about time, reality, and fiction and pushes beyond old social protest literature to illuminate basic verities of Latin American history and culture.

I am sorry to hear about Gass's problems with his father and his young playmate, but the tale adds nothing to the reader's knowledge of perhaps the most vibrant prose writing in the world. But then I recall no thrill from the "fizz of fine grape soda through the upper nose."

One would hope that Gass is not responsible for the box insert of "Recent Latin American Novels." Juan Goytisolo, a masterful writer, was born in 1931 in Barcelona, studied there and in Madrid, and since 1957 has lived in France for the most part. Barcelona is a city in Spain. Spain is a country in Europe, near Portugal and France. Latin America is in the Western Hemisphere, roughly south of Key West, Laredo, Nogales, and other such places. It includes Brazil, a Portuguese-speaking nation. The box could read "Spanish-

*(continued on page 38)*



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THE NEW REPUBLIC

November 8, 1980

# The Inflation Abyss

On October 24 the government reported that inflation was running at an annual rate of 12.7 percent, led by food prices, which increased almost two percent in the month of September alone. The next day, in Toledo, Ohio, a presidential candidate talked about the cost of food. "Corn has gone from $1.60 in 1977 to over three dollars," the candidate thundered. "Wheat has gone from two dollars to over four dollars. Cattle prices have doubled, from $32 to $64. Milk that sold for less than $10 now sells for over $13." A pretty damning indictment of the incumbent? He didn't think so. President Carter, the speaker, continued to his audience of farmers: "I'm not completely satisfied with that record. But we've made good progress, with more progress to come."

This is not an idle boast. Carter's enthusiastic administration of the farm price support system is indeed responsible for much of the dramatic increase in food prices during his tenure in the White House. You might think Carter's bragging about how successful he's been in driving up the cost of food, and his promise to do even better in the future, would be seized upon by his opponents. But the only criticism of Carter's farm policy heard from Ronald Reagan and, yes, even John Anderson during the campaign was that Carter hasn't been dedicated enough to producing higher farm prices.

We write before the election. But the traditional pandering to farmers by all three major candidates suggests that no matter who is our next president, he will not be someone who appreciates the seriousness of our economic ailment. Consider: OPEC hasn't raised oil prices in a year; unemployment remains at recession levels; real growth is negligible—and even so, after just a few months' respite, inflation is back in double digits. It's eerie how quickly we become inured. Today's inflation is in a range reached only twice before 1979: when World War II price controls were removed, and at the height of the first OPEC oil shock. Now we have achieved it with no special excuse, and without even the real economic boom that has pushed inflation up to lesser peaks in the past. At 12.7 percent inflation, prices double in less than six years. At this rate, a dollar today will be worth 62 cents on election day 1984. (A 1976 dollar, already down to 69 cents, will be worth 42 cents.) And we are near the bottom of a price cycle, not at the top. The last cycle peaked at 18 percent. Who will bet that we won't pass 20 this time? At 20 percent inflation, prices double in less than four years.

Inflation at these levels not only erodes the economy in dozens of different ways. It also corrodes social life: turning group against group; rewarding profligacy while punishing work and thrift; drafting us all into a desperate game that generates panic, bitterness, and cynicism among winners and losers alike. A stable currency is a living metaphor for the social contract. It assures citizens that what they have will not be taken from them without due process of law; without it, this basic guarantee becomes an illusion. It also is essential to commerce; without it, the economy degenerates toward economic isolation and primitive barter. In short, the government's failure to provide a stable currency undermines many of the reasons people have for joining together in society. Most democracies do not survive for very long the kind of inflation we are approaching heedlessly. Even if ours proves more resilient, the price, both financial and spiritual, will be high.

The election campaign just past provided little reassurance about the possibility of stopping inflation within a democratic framework. The candidates, especially the two traditional party ones, vied with lavish offers of feudal protection to one group after another, in exchange for electoral support. Every promise of this sort just makes the inflation dilemma more intractable. If the man who will be president for the next four years truly felt the predicament we are drifting toward, he gave no sign of it.



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## White House Watch

# The Hostage Game

For seven days after the US embassy in Tehran and most of its staff were seized on Sunday, November 4, 1979, by thugs who called themselves students, President Carter said nothing publicly about the event. He left comment to his press secretary, Jody Powell, at the White House, and to State Department spokesman Hodding Carter. On Monday the 5th, the first business day after the seizure, Powell said that Iranian authorities in Tehran and at the Iranian embassy in Washington had promised to do what they could to obtain early release of the hostages, and that "high level" US officials had met at the White House. Powell also said that the President was "monitoring" the situation and that the national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, had reported on the White House meeting to Carter afterward, indicating that the President had not attended it. On November 9, when the President met at the State Department with 18 relatives of the captives, he said nothing to the public. A formal White House statement on that day said that "the President shares" the nation's feelings of "outrage . . . frustration . . . deep anger." Such statements are not issued in anybody's name, Powell's or Carter's or anybody else's. This one said that the President was "pursuing every possible avenue" to get the hostages released, thanked the American people for their restraint, and urged them to continue keeping the captives' safety "uppermost in their minds." In short and unspoken: don't press him to do or say anything that might aggravate the captors and the Iranian authorities, such as they were.

At 2:10 p.m. on November 12, the President appeared in the White House press room, spoke his first personal words on the subject, and announced his first action. He again thanked Americans for their restraint, reminded them again that "the lives of our people in Iran are at stake," and said: "I am ordering that we discontinue purchasing of any oil from Iran for delivery to this country." He then made the first of many uses of the situation for energy conservation: "These events obviously demonstrate the extreme importance of reducing oil consumption here in the United States. I urge every American citizen and every American business to redouble efforts to curtail the use of petroleum products."

That action didn't make much difference either in Iran or in the US. Two days later, on the 14th, the President took and announced an action that made a great difference. It figured importantly in the events that in October 1980 raised rumors and hopes that the 52 remaining hostages might soon be released and opened Carter to suspicions that he and some of his subordinates had shamelessly manipulated events and seeming events to improve his chance of reelection on the anniversary of the seizure. He blocked "all official Iranian assets in the United States, including deposits in United States banks and their foreign banks and subsidiaries." The blockage—it was not a "seizure," in the sense of taking title to the assets—also included military items and spare parts that the deposed shah's government had ordered and paid for, a factor in the action that would enormously complicate it and lead to some confused reporting in October.

The action was generally thought then, and universally remembered later, to be a direct protest against the seizure of the embassy and the hostages. It resulted from that outrage, but it was not taken and might never have been taken for that reason alone. As the White House announcement of Executive Order 12170 plainly said, "this order is in response to reports that the government of Iran is about to withdraw its funds [from US depositories]. The purpose of this order is to ensure that claims on Iran by the United States and its citizens are provided for in an orderly manner." In a legally required submission and explanation of the order to Congress, Carter referred to "recent events in Iran" but emphasized that it would "assure that these resources will be available to satisfy lawful claims by citizens and entities of the United States against the government of Iran." The Treasury had received intelligence information in the dawn hours of the 14th that the Iranian government intended to withdraw all its bank deposits and all other reachable assets from US custody at the opening of business that morning. Treasury and White House officials, lawyers, and press spokesmen were alerted at around 5 a.m. and a blockage order was ready for the President's signature at 8 a.m. It was filed with the Office of the Federal Register, making it instantly effective, at 9:15 a.m. Its language said it applied to and only to accounts and holdings of the Iranian government, the Central Bank of Iran, "and other controlled entities"—a limitation whose significance will be explored after a few subsequent events are noted.

On November 19 and 20 Tehran reports and threats that some of the hostages might be tried as spies inspired the first official US hints that military means might be invoked if economic and diplomatic pressures failed. A White House statement said the Iranian government "would bear full responsibility" for any consequences of bringing hostages to trial and added that "a peaceful solution . . . is far preferable to the other remedies available to the United States."

At his first press conference following the seizure, Carter said on November 28 that "this nation will never yield to blackmail"; threw out his second hint of military action by saying it would be unwise for him to set a deadline for "certain action in the future"; and for the first time proclaimed his Rose Garden strategy of restricting his "political activities" and calling on any and all prospective opponents "to support my position as President and provide unity." Reassurances of utmost effort to get the hostages freed continued with



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suffocating frequency until April 1, the day of the Democratic primary in Wisconsin, when the President appeared in the White House press room at 7:20 a.m. and said on live television that the President of Iran, the powerless Bani-Sadr, had announced in "a positive step" that control of the hostages would pass from their captors to the Iranian government. The transfer did not occur and Carter's performance indelibly stamped him as a President using the crisis for his political purposes.

It was followed on April 17 by complaints that Iranian authorities had reneged on personal assurances to Carter officials, the imposition of additional US economic sanctions, and the end of diplomatic relations with Iran. In a message to Congress explaining the new and essentially ineffective sanctions, the President said: "In addition, I have ordered that all undelivered military equipment and spare parts purchased by Iran under the Arms Export Control Act now be distributed to our own armed forces or transferred to other buyers."

This widely overlooked or forgotten directive provides occasion for noting some of the oddities and complications of the assets blockage. The generally reported and accepted total of eight billion dollars in frozen assets is two billion dollars short of the real total of around $10 billion. Probably four billion dollars of that total is held in US banks, the rest in foreign branches or affiliates of US banks. A significant portion of the overall total has been reduced by banks "accelerating" the due dates of loans to Iranian government entities and collecting the loans from Iranian deposits, actions that in the opinion of responsible US official attorneys may or may not be legally defensible. Some 250 private suits and efforts at attachment of various Iranian assets, particularly bank deposits, are known to total more than the value of Iranian assets physically held in the US. Lawyers advising Carter have told him, though you'd never know it from him, that it almost certainly will take years to dispose of these claims and actually return much of the frozen Iranian holdings to the Iranian government and its "controlled entities." A major, unresolved, and highly controversial legal question is to what extent the principle of "sovereign immunity" from private suits protects the Iranian government, its Central Bank, and its military organizations from private claims. As for the Iranian demand that the US return to the Iran government "the shah's wealth" in private depositories, properties, and other forms in the US, Carter and other US officials have been saying since early 1980 that the US government has no control over it and that the only way to get at it is through the courts. A portion of the Iranian assets is in gold and US securities on deposit in US Federal Reserve banks. Whether they are subject to blockage at all is questioned by some government attorneys, though not by Carter's White House lawyers. A strong argument can be made that the Fed deposits are protected by sovereign immunity.

A particularly complicated and interesting facet is the status and availability of sequestered military material that Iran has purchased or that has been purchased for its account. Most media reports assume that between $400 and $500 million worth of such material, including fighter-bomber engines and other vital spares, is stored at McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey. Printed estimates of this stuff's value run up to $2.5 billion. Around $500 million is about right, with an important proviso. The undisclosed portion of the total that was purchased for Iran by the US government under the Foreign Military Sales Program and held for later payment and possession by Iran has been dispersed to US forces and other buyers, as the President directed on April 17. Only a portion of the portion ordered and paid for directly by the Iranian government is held in depots around the country and available for immediate release and delivery to Iran if the hostages are released and the President orders it, as he said in the October 28 debate with Reagan that he would do. A major item in the overall total is a conventional submarine of outmoded design that the shah's government ordered and the present government asked the US to sell to somebody else. No other buyer has been found and the unwanted sub is docked at New London, Connecticut. Even parts paid for by Iran may not be stored and labeled "Iran." If released for delivery, some of them would have to be taken from US and other warehoused stocks or in a great rush from current production lines.

Finally and in brief, having dumped US neutrality in the Iraq-Iran war, the President is likely to be profoundly embarrassed if Iran calls upon him for instant release and delivery of the military items and financial assets that he has promised when and if the hostages are freed.

**John Osborne**

## Politics

# Carter's Debate

Except for two savvy editors from Iowa and Mississippi retained by PBS's "McNeil-Lehrer Report," virtually the entire US instant-analysis establishment, print and electronic, pronounced the Carter-Reagan debate a draw, a tie, or an indefinable mish-mash. Many of the analysts went on to say that by the 1960 rule a challenger wins if he survives debating with an incumbent, and therefore the effective victor in this year's presidential debate was Reagan.

I couldn't disagree more. I thought that by every measure except aw-shucks niceness, Carter was the clearly superior performer. He kept Reagan on the



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defensive, forced Reagan to accept his agenda for discussion, and made Reagan out to be the scourge of all things that Democrats traditionally hold dear. Reagan, by contrast, missed repeated opportunities to clobber Carter, let Carter keep the focus on the war/peace issue instead of turning it to the economy, and failed to put his arguments into an overall national context. I'm not saying that Carter's victory on points will win him the election, but I think if anyone gains politically from the Tuesday night matchup, it will be Carter.

There must be better ways to choose presidents than staging shootouts at the TV corral a week before the election. Debates surely give citizens more information about the candidates than paid advertising, and have the added advantage of showing the candidates under pressure. But the skills required to win a TV debate—aggressiveness, a capacity to simplify, the ability to think on one's feet—are not those primarily involved in governing the country well, which are deliberation, decision-making, and policy-setting. Persuasiveness and self-confidence are governance virtues as well as debate virtues, but there are other ways to convey them besides holding debates. The best suggested reform of the year comes from John Sears, Ronald Reagan's former campaign manager, who called for the TV networks to offer each of the major candidates one half hour of prime time per week for an address on the subject of his choosing. Each contender would have to fill eight separate programs with interesting and informative arguments, or risk boring the audience. And these statements would be available for thorough analysis by the opposition, news organizations, independent researchers, and interest groups in a way that stump speeches seldom are. Providing the candidates with free air time is the least the TV industry can do, considering the staggering amount of money (taxpayers' money, at that, during the general election) that television rakes in in advertising revenues during a political year.

But back to last Tuesday and its impact on this Tuesday. Ronald Reagan was defensive literally from the outset. He didn't know the differences between himself and Carter on war and peace, he said, "because I don't know what Mr. Carter's policies are," and he went on to assure everyone that he is for peace as well as strength. Reagan made an important point—and he should have made it more often—when he said that "we can get into a war by letting events get out of hand as they have in the last three and a half years under the foreign policies of this administration." But Reagan dropped the argument without driving it home: four more years of Carter could be dangerous. Carter countered by wrapping himself in soothing words—"peace" (which he used 10 times in the first round of give and take) and "strength" (five times)—and by claiming that "since I've been in office we've had a steady, carefully planned, methodical but very effective increase in our commitment for defense," all dedicated, of course, "to preserve the peace." In fact, Carter came to office calling for defense decreases. During his first year he actually claimed to have fulfilled this promise before reversing field completely. Reagan tried to call attention to Carter's defense cutbacks, then unaccountably accused Carter of being the quick-draw candidate this race because he has recommended a Rapid Deployment Force. If Reagan's point was supposed to be that Carter is inconsistent, it did not come through. Carter finished off the first war/peace exchange with the shot that "I think habitually Governor Reagan has advocated the injection of military forces into troubled areas when I and my predecessors, both Democrats and Republicans, have advocated resolving those troubles . . . diplomatically and through negotiation."

Reagan scored his best points on the economy, as well he ought, but he allowed Carter to wriggle loose and come back for an attack. The economic issue should have become the main issue of the campaign. That Carter came to office with inflation at 4.8 percent, that it's been up to 18 percent, and is now (at a time Carter claims things are improving) at 12.7 percent is a devastating indictment. Reagan did make a strong case that Carter has blamed everybody but himself for inflation—the people, OPEC, the federal reserve system, and low worker productivity. But instead of blaming Carter's mismanagement, Reagan attacked the amorphous federal government. Carter came back assailing the "ridiculous" Reagan-Kemp-Roth tax cut plan and the "heartless" suggestion that the minimum wage be scrapped. Reagan never, I think, demonstrated that his economic program would lead to long-term answers to the nation's problems, but Carter did claim that his would, going so far as to assert that there was "a very bright vista for our country in the future" because the windfall profits tax (which Reagan opposes, Carter noted) would be used

## Straight answers

***U.S. Refuses Saudis' Request For Bomb Racks on F15 Jets***

—*The Washington Post*, October 28

**U. S. IS CONSIDERING SAUDI BID ON F-15'S**

—*The New York Times*, October 28



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to finance synthetic fuels production and a new jobs boom. Reagan offered no exciting future at all, which may be more realistic, but is thin gruel politically.

In the closing days of the campaign, we'll doubtless see Carter try to make points with blacks by using Reagan's statement that "we've made great progress from the days when I was young and when this country didn't even know it had a racial problem." The statement doubtless will be used to portray Reagan as abysmally insensitive to racism, when it does not necessarily imply that at all. But Reagan did fail to win any black support with his hesitant explanation of how urban enterprise zones would work. He slapped Carter hard for failing to rebuild the South Bronx and had a good point in alleging that government programs often lead to dead-end jobs for blacks. But Carter turned the issue back to his advantage, reciting the Democratic party's record on unemployment compensation, the minimum wage, and national health insurance—which he supports and Reagan has opposed.

Carter even managed to convert the Iran hostage issue to his advantage, by turning his answer to Barbara Walters's excellent question on anti-terrorist policy into a discourse on nuclear proliferation, thereby hanging a dead weight around Reagan's neck. Reagan should have thrown it right back at Carter by pointing out that the administration has just approved nuclear fuel sales to India. He also could have referred to administration connections to "terrorist regimes" such as Libya. But he blew the chance, went on the defensive, and allowed Carter to portray him as an advocate of uncontrolled nuclear weapons development. Reagan says he is no such thing, though he and other Republicans have criticized Carter's pre-India policy of opposing nuclear fuel sales by US allies. Reagan's problem on proliferation and numerous other embarrassing issues—Social Security, SALT, the minimum wage—has been his failure to clarify his positions early enough in the campaign to set them firmly in the public mind and to avoid distortion by Carter.

Carter managed to make nuclear arms control seem the most vital issue of the debate and the campaign. Carter said: "There is a disturbing pattern in the attitude of Governor Reagan. He has never supported any arms control agreements: the limited test ban, SALT I, nor the anti-ballistic missile treaty nor the Vladivostok treaty negotiated by President Ford. Now he wants to throw into the wastebasket a treaty negotiated over a period of seven years by myself and my two Republican predecessors." Carter also made a telling case on the arms race issue—that the United States would do everything possible to respond if Soviet president Brezhnev declared an intention to seek "superiority." Reagan should have responded that the Soviets have decided to seek superiority as indicated by their weapons build-ups, and that Republican proposals for increased US defense spending are justified. Instead Reagan retreated by denying that he favors US superiority or opposes arms control.

Reagan might well earn a sympathy vote for enduring Carter's attacks with good humor and possibly (if Reagan was believed) for claiming Carter was misquoting and misinterpreting him. But Carter's task was to get Democratic constituencies out to vote on election day, and I think Reagan helped him. He let Carter walk him through the old Democratic coalition—feminists, blacks, workers, southerners, the poor—and responded to Carter's claims to represent the real interests of those groups. Instead of forcing Carter onto the defensive, instead of making an appeal of his own to Democrats, Reagan seemed partisan. He said when he quoted Democratic presidents, it was because "I was a Democrat. I said many foolish things back in those days." And he kept using the word "Democrat" as an adjective—"Democrat president," "Democrat promise"—à la Bob Dole.

Despite a strong final statement aimed directly at voter misgivings about another four years of Carter, Reagan came off as a weak challenger to the incumbent president, one who failed to prove his ability to improve on the record of the present administration, and one who (despite his television and acting experience) can be rendered defensive and apologetic. I think Reagan's debate performance was like his campaign: unaggressive, unimaginative, cautious, and dull.

This doesn't mean that Carter is going to win the election, the result of which will be known when some readers get this magazine. Though I have been irrepressibly free with predictions throughout this political year, the outcome is too close to call. All electoral vote projections prior to the debate showed Reagan well ahead of Carter, but Reagan's lead in many states (including, apparently, even his home state of California) was narrow and vulnerable to a late Carter surge.

**Morton Kondracke**

Getting rich in the ivory tower.

# Hot Genes

Last month a human gene potentially worth more than a billion dollars became the subject of dispute between the University of California and the drug firm of Hoffmann-La Roche. The gene contained the genetic information for synthesizing interferon, the body's anti-viral substance whose possible efficacy against cancer has made it one of the hottest properties in the drug industry. Researchers at the University of California extracted the cells in question from a patient who later died of leukemia. They passed the cells on to a colleague at the National Cancer Institute, who discovered the cells' ability to produce interferon. The colleague in turn gave samples of the cells for

*(continued on page 12)*



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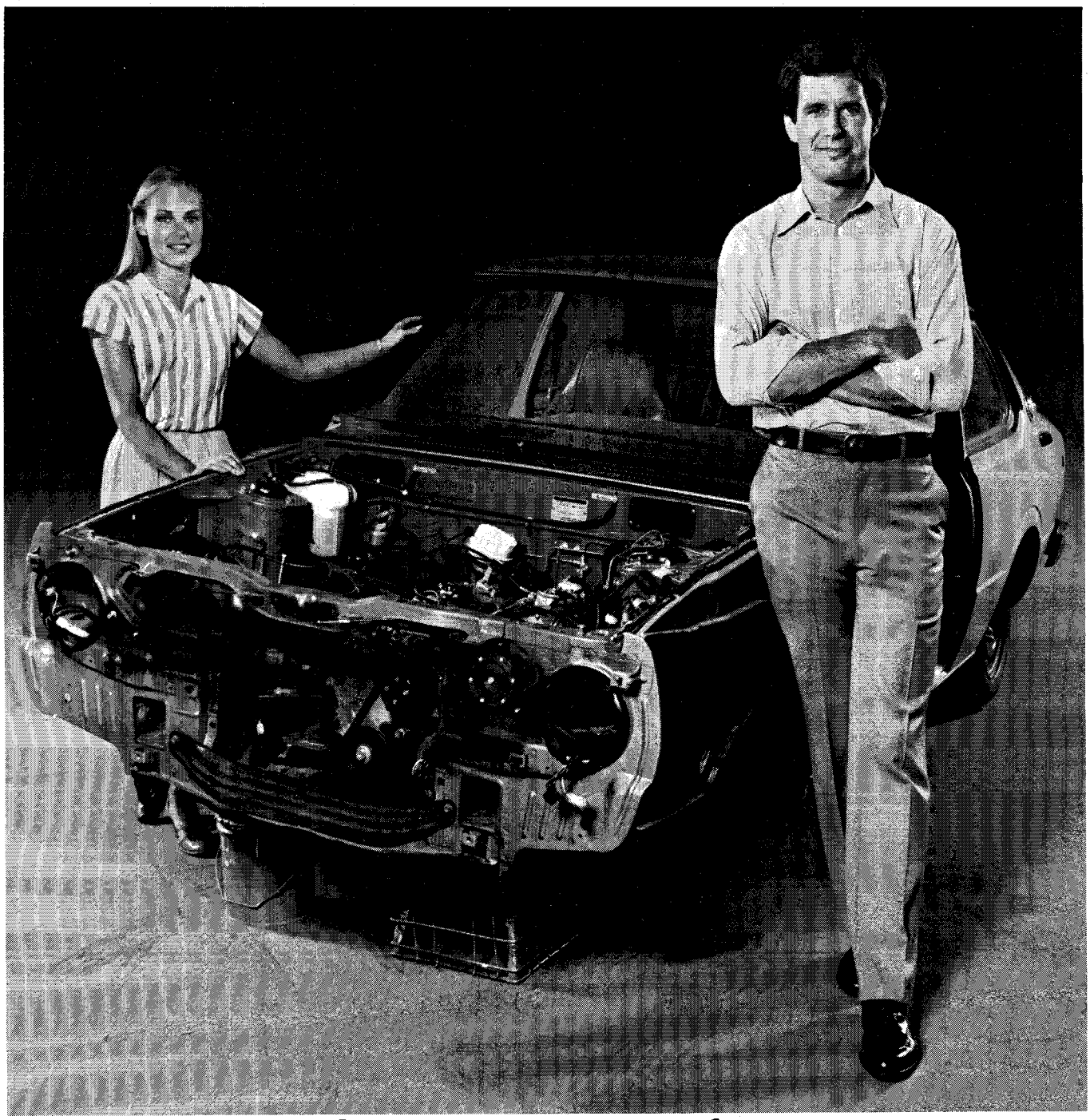

# Introducing the 1980 Fraudmobile.

Among the 1.1 million cars stolen last year was a growing fleet of Fraudmobiles...vehicles like the one you see above.

Some car owners, you see, keep pace with inflation by having their cars dismantled in whole or part. Then they hide the remains,

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collect the claims... and do a reassembly.

Others solve the energy crisis by hiring a "torch" to roast their gas-guzzler and then put in for a total loss.

These are only two ways owners pocket millions annually in illicit payments and drive up auto rates for everybody.[1]

Is anyone out there tempted to join them? Ætna Life & Casualty offers a few words of warning.

We're participating with other insurers in the National Automobile Theft Bureau, whose central computer doggedly sniffs out Fraudmobile traffic.

Over the past two years, we've devoted ourselves to seminars which help John Law pinpoint Fraudmobile owners.[2]

And along with using "fraud profiles,"[3] we're offering cash rewards to our 37,000 employees for information leading to the recovery of stolen vehicles.

More can be done. It should be. *It will be!*[4] Because neither you nor Ætna wants to see a day when insuring your car might cost more than paying for it.

# Ætna wants insurance to be affordable.

[1] Another popular technique is the "paper" car—a phantom automobile registered and insured solely to be reported stolen, then collected on. Thanks to such methods, auto theft *in general* is accelerating at over 10% a year, and cost Americans $2 billion plus in 1979.

[2] Ætna participated in the 1978 National Workshop on Auto-Theft Prevention and was a primary sponsor of last year's Connecticut Auto-Theft Reduction Seminar.

[3] A "fraud profile" asks such questions as: Was the theft reported within 60 days of the insurance policy's effective date? Or was it *not* reported to the police—a basic policy violation? Was the car recovered burned, and hence of no value except to support a claim? Can the claimant produce no ownership title at all? The more suspicious answers, the higher the red flag gets hoisted.

[4] Ætna supports standardizing title procedures and effective disposition of vehicle identification numbers at the wrecking yard. This would put the brakes on "paper" car theft by giving every legitimate vehicle its own "birth" and "death" certificates.

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research purposes to a scientist at the Roche Institute of Molecular Biology—with no idea that Roche would seek to exploit the cells commercially. But, in apparent contravention of the gentlemen's agreement by which researchers exchange materials, Roche filed for patents on the interferon gene produced by the cells which had come into the company's possession. A naive observer might conclude that the interferon gene was the inalienable property of its owner or, since he is dead, of his heirs. Be that as it may, both Roche and the University of California are claiming the gene for themselves. The controversy is perhaps typical of many that the new biotechnology will engender.

From Stanford to Harvard, from west coast to east, the nation's foremost biological researchers have been gripped by an electrifying new discovery: a heap of easy money can be made out of the test tube manipulation of human and other genes. A lot of biologists are going to end up better off from the gold rush now under way. The same prediction cannot be made for the ideal that allegedly inspires them, the disinterested pursuit of truth.

WHAT HAS made so brisk a business out of molecular biology was the discovery in 1973 of an extraordinarily precise and powerful method of manipulating DNA, the ribbon-like molecule whose structure constitutes the genetic program of an organism. The method, known as recombinant DNA or gene splicing, depends on the use of certain enzymes produced by bacteria to cut and splice the DNA at precisely defined points. The most immediate of its many practical consequences is that it makes it possible to take genes from one organism and splice them into the gene set of another.

Why would anyone but Frankenstein be interested? For scientists, the procedure is an invaluable way of seeing how genes work. More practical is the ability to program bacteria with human genes that specify products of medical importance, such as interferon, insulin, and growth hormone.

Though the technique was invented seven years ago, biologists are only now working out the nuts and bolts of a commercially viable process. The gene of interest, that for human interferon, say, has first to be fished out of a cell possessing some 100,000 other genes. Other sequences of DNA must be attached to it which signal the bacterium's protein-making machinery to manufacture the gene's product in commercially significant quantities.

While biologists were solving these problems, venture capitalists were busy setting up companies to exploit the new technology. Genentech of San Francisco, the most successful of the new companies, was founded in 1976. Its three main contenders are Biogen, incorporated in Luxembourg, Cetus of Berkeley, and Genex of Bethesda, Maryland. Mostly the companies are partnerships between venture capitalists and leading academic scientists, usually with a large dollop of oil company money thrown in. Recently Harvard added a new twist by announcing that it is considering plans for a genetic engineering company of its own.

For the last year or more, the four companies and their imitators have been feverishly hyping the new age of biotechnology, of which they consider themselves the harbingers. The propaganda blitz was so successful that the paper worth of the four enterprises had reached a total of some $225 million by September 1979, and had more than doubled to $500 million by May of this year. This exhilarating walk over water has occurred without a single product having yet reached the market. The next step for the new companies, so far funded by private capital, is to raise money from the public. By creating a public market for their shares, the scientists and entrepreneurs who hold stock in the new companies will be able to translate their pieces of paper into millions in hard cash.

"None of these companies has any thought of going public and if they were we would tell them not to because there is no guarantee as yet that this technology will produce anything," declared Nelson Schneider, an E. F. Hutton analyst who watches the field closely, as recently as May this year. A few weeks later Genentech announced plans to sell equity to the public. October 14, when trading in Genentech's shares began, was a historic day on Wall Street. Within 20 minutes after the start of trading, Genentech stock had leapt from an initial $35 to the extraordinary height of $89 a share. It closed at $71, giving the fledgling company a market capitalization of some $530 million, and making the holdings of its two founders, Robert Swanson and Herbert Boyer, worth some $66 million apiece. In its four and a half years of existence, the company has accumulated a loss of more than $500,000. Its hopes of profit rest heavily on methods of producing in bacteria the human proteins of insulin, interferon, and growth hormone. All three products still face the uncertainties of clinical trials and FDA approval; and over interferon, the biggest potential money spinner, hangs the cloud of the claim brought by the University of California against Roche, for which Genentech developed the interferon process.

Go-go genes and the alluring slosh of hard cash are novel and somewhat disruptive elements in biological research. They already have altered the quiet pace of laboratory life in several ways. Freedom of communication has not been improved. Why discuss your latest theories with your colleagues until you have a patent application on file? An unguarded word about your latest cloning experiment may tip off the rival combine down the corridor. Scientists are accustomed to exchange materials, such as cell lines, on the basis of mutual trust. Yet the way in which the interferon-producing cells, for example, passed from the University of California researchers into the hands of Hoffmann-La Roche and Genentech suggests that the drug company broke or ignored the unspoken gentleman's agreement under which its scientists obtained the


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cells. This and similar episodes in which private greed has prevailed over collegial trust militate against the public interest, which is to maintain maximum ease of communication among the researchers it supports.

The companies formed to exploit genetic engineering have dropped into the habit of blazoning forth each advancement at press conferences instead of by publication in the scientific literature. Press conferences are preferred to the traditional mode of scientific announcement because the reporters don't have the time to raise the points of detail which alone can establish whether any claim is more than so much hot air. One company, Biogen, managed to double its self-assessed paper value, from $50 million to $100 million, on the basis of a single press conference, held on January 6 this year. Biogen announced on that occasion that it had cloned the human gene for interferon, a substance which it is prematurely being assumed will help treat human cancer.

Does any of this matter? In its passage to the marketplace, molecular biology is only following the same road taken by many other pure sciences as they become applicable to daily life. Every study of innovation praises the process as a socially laudable objective. As for researchers clamming up on each other, the pressures of competition engendered by the academic rat race made them pretty tight-lipped anyway.

But science is meant to be the disinterested pursuit of truth. Molecular biology at present is going through a curious phase of discovery, in which pure and applied research are so close to each other as to be almost identical. If the same individuals pursue both goals, the chances for confusion are particularly acute.

Molecular biology may lose its independence if corporate interests become dominant in the research lab. Nor will society be able to call upon the disinterested advice of the academics it pays if the most able of them are tied up as consultants or directors. The ethical problems that will be raised by the impending advances in biology guarantee that that advice will be needed one day.

Chemists and engineers in academe have been serving as business consultants for years: what is so different about molecular biology? Maybe not much. Yet molecular biology deals with the stuff of life. Over the next few years biologists will part the last veils that enshroud the mystery of living things. They will learn to master the very technology whereby evolution has shaped all the life forms of Earth. Shouldn't those who learn such secrets be above reproach?

When the recombinant DNA technique was first discovered, scientists' first reaction was to keep the profit motive at arm's length. The inventors of the technique, Stanley Cohen and Herbert Boyer, did not even think to patent it. Their universities later applied for a patent on their behalf, whereupon Cohen and Boyer renounced all royalties. Cohen did so partly to be able to participate in public debate about the research without his motives being questioned.

Times and attitudes have changed considerably. In the five years since Cohen's and Boyer's renunciation, molecular biologists have come to realize that gene splicing is not just a tool of pure research, it is also an implement for providing fame and fortune, both for private gain and to create more money for research, more jobs for scientists. Biologists can be heard arguing that by sitting on the boards of corporations, they can keep control of the technology, or that if anyone is going to make money out of their inventions, why shouldn't they?

Maybe these arguments are correct. Molecular biologists have as much right to get rich as anybody else. But the mood of renunciation suited them better.

**Nicholas Wade**

*Nicholas Wade* is a reporter for *Science* magazine.

When is a textbook not a textbook?

# The Learning Hustle

America's public schools might seem unlikely places for giant corporations to go in search of profits. Over the last decade news from the schools has been grim. School walls have been crumbling, students illiterate, and teachers frustrated. Despite this hostile atmosphere salesmen from educational materials companies have been attending classes more enthusiastically than many students.

The corporate results have been impressive. During a period when schools have been closing because of declining enrollments, sales of materials such as textbooks, reading kits, and workbooks have been climbing at a solid eight to 10 percent a year, reaching over one billion dollars this year. Profit margins have been healthy, according to Wall Street analysts, with strong companies boasting margins of 12 percent, a figure double the average for US industry.

Part of the reason for the success is that the once staid educational industry has discovered marketing. Companies have been producing a flood of "new and improved" products, and they have been persuading educators to buy. "If you go back to 1960 the typical arithmetic teacher used one book per kid," explains Dr. Robert Rasmussen, vice president of the school division of the Association of American Publishers, a trade group. "Now she probably has three or four."

In the early 1950s there were only about 15,000 items listed in educational catalogues, according to industry sources. Now there are well over 250,000, including audio cassettes, filmstrips, reading kits, and paperback books. The great outpouring of these products began in the mid-1960s, when schools were flush



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with federal money and new ideas flowed about making education an agent of social change. Companies such as McGraw-Hill and CBS leaped in, producing brightly colored reading kits, film strips, and flash cards. Xerox brought out a kit called "The Way It Is," consisting of pamphlets housed in a box, which was designed to be "a bold reading program for today's inner city learners." One of the paperback volumes, called *Rumble Tonight*, features pictures of youths with knives in an alley. Questions in accompanying workbooks ask the students to tell how they feel about the stories.

Schools snapped up the new products. But all the while students' reading and math scores continued to drop steadily in cities and towns, rich districts and poor. In recent years enthusiasm for bold ideas has waned. Still the education industry has continued to bring out new generations of products. Xerox Education Publications currently offers Flash Gordon remedial reading kits priced at $152. Each kit contains four sound filmstrips based on the comic. After viewing a film students read 325-word stories printed on cards. The kits come with posters.

Media companies of all stripes have attempted to recycle their products to the schools. Walt Disney Educational Media uses Mickey Mouse and other familiar characters in its films and kits. Associated Press for some years has printed its stories on cards and housed them in attractive boxes to produce a kit. Marketed by Westinghouse Learning Corporation, a set of 150 articles sells for $124.50. While reading articles is undoubtedly a useful exercise, it is difficult to see why teachers could not simply cut up newspapers themselves.

Most of the kits are intended to be supplementary materials. After the school has purchased its basic textbooks (which account for most sales), the companies seek to increase revenues by selling additional products. But the widest profit margins come from the enormous range of supplementary materials. The distinction between the substance of textbooks and kits is often vague. The kits, which usually consist of short selections organized in boxes, provide material that could normally come in book form. A selection, for example, from a kit by Science Research Associates, an IBM subsidiary, describes a familiar figure. "When Helen Keller was just a baby," it begins, "she was very ill." In multiple choice questions that follow the brief selection, students must indicate why Helen Keller could not see or hear. The exercise itself is no different from those used in schools a generation ago. The only difference is packaging.

Teachers, like other American consumers, prefer what is current. And fashions in education change quickly. New kinds of equipment burst on the scene, and companies selling them thrive. Businesses specializing in products that are suddenly out of vogue suffer bad years. Companies tend to follow each other closely. When one introduces a product that sells well others will quickly bring out similar items. Copies tend to be very close to the original, since successful product developers are often hired away by competing companies to reproduce their work.

When the new math was introduced into the schools, publishers hurried to provide the appropriate textbooks and supplementary materials. Teachers and students soon found themselves confused, and computation scores dropped. Another innovation of the 1960s was individualized instruction. Using the reading kits, students began with easier selections and moved along at their own pace to more difficult levels. But some teachers were quickly disillusioned with the concept. With each student working alone, the classroom sometimes dissolved into chaos.

In the last decade the new math and other innovative programs have been declared failures and a "back to basics" movement has swept the country. The companies swiftly began producing goal-oriented materials designed to help students pass new state competency tests. Sales of educational films, which soared during the era of McLuhan, have dipped. One product that is expected to gain its place soon in the educational market is the computer designed for use by students.

How do teachers decide which educational bandwagon to jump on? The method varies considerably from state to state and school district to school district. In Texas and California state boards adopt a list of acceptable materials from which local schools can make selections. In other states local schools are free to choose whatever they want. Winning a place on the adoption list of a large state can mean the difference between profit and loss, and publishers go to considerable lengths to promote their products.

The guiding principle in many publishing houses is that the marketing staff predominates over the editorial side. In a survey of a group of educational publishers

## The New American Hustler

America is still the land of opportunity, but the opportunities have changed somewhat under conditions of what some call "late capitalism." This is another article in an occasional series examining new opportunities for riches created by the mixed economy and the post-industrial age.

These modern entrepreneurs are likely to share three characteristics in contrast to their counterparts a century ago. First, what they are selling tends to be more amorphous and ephemeral, and not obviously connected to the production of goods and services that add directly to the national prosperity. Second, they often depend on the existence of a large government sector, either as a customer or a generator of the need for their services. Third, most of the new American capitalists described in this series are politically liberal, perhaps because their prosperity depends on the society the liberal vision has created.



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by the American Association of Publishers, marketing costs absorbed 19 percent of sales revenues. A survey of a similar group showed that editorial expenses accounted for 4.6 percent. Sales people maintain close contact with curriculum boards and teachers whose views influence selection. The marketers carefully monitor journals and speeches by trend-setters.

In recent years publishing companies have reached new heights of ingenuity in trying to attract the attention of their customers at educational conventions. Last May, at the International Reading Association meeting in St. Louis, more than 10,000 participants were treated to a range of events. Rand McNally proved especially innovative. Instead of showing educational products in its exhibition space, the company displayed a red Mustang, which was raffled off to a lucky educator. Those people interested in seeing Rand McNally's products could do so at the company's hotel suite. Houghton Mifflin, in a more traditional vein, sponsored a hootenanny where it raffled off a patchwork quilt. Economy Company hosted a boat ride on the Mississippi.

"In some cases teachers are sitting ducks for salesmen," says Kenneth Komoski, executive director of Educational Products Information Exchange Institute, a federally funded nonprofit consumer group. "There are few districts that have a really clear set of instructional criteria and learning needs in mind." Too often teachers buy materials students do not understand or feel comfortable with. Books and supplemental purchases often are not coordinated. "You get a lot of stuff bought that doesn't get used," Komoski observes. "You go into a storeroom or library and there's a bunch of stuff that hasn't been opened."

The tragedy of purchasing inappropriate materials is not so much that money is wasted—compared to other government expenditures the amount spent on educational materials is small. The real problem is that student learning time is lost. Komoski points out that market research for new supplemental materials is usually limited to teacher evaluations, a practice which provides only an idea of how well the product might sell. In addition, the practice allows companies to advertise that the new product already has been used in the schools. Publishing companies provide little useful data on the effectiveness of their products. Recognizing this, a group of publishers will conduct a study next year attempting to show that if twice the number of materials are used in the classroom scores will increase.

Bursts of federal funding often produce a fresh outpouring of educational materials as companies rush to develop products for schools suddenly loaded with cash. In the last several years concern about the handicapped has led to increased funding for special education. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 provides that students with disabilities have free public education available to them by 1980. Teaching Resources, a leading special education company owned by the *New York Times*, entered the field 15 years ago and in the last several years has been joined by a host of competitors. Last year Teaching Resources introduced 27 new products—and achieved record earnings.

Most of the company's products are developed from ideas submitted by outsiders. In most cases these are teachers or professors who have been using a game or exercise in their school and believe it can be sold to others. The Fokes Sentence Builder, for instance, sells for $57 and is designed to help students build verbal skills. The kit consists of five boxes of cards labeled "which," "who," "is doing," "what," and "where." In the "who" box, for example, the cards have simple drawings with labels such as "the girl" or "the carpenters." The "is doing" box contains pictures labeled "hit" and "drink." The cards can be combined to make sentences of varying complexity. Additional supplementary boxes of "Whose," "How," and "When" can be purchased for $34.

THE DECLINE of the schools has given a boost to sales of low-priced instructional materials—one of the fastest growing areas of the field. This includes games selling for less than $10, flash cards, and workbooks. Dozens of companies have been popping up around the country, many of them started by teachers anxious to leave their frustrating profession. The new businesses supply school stores, which have been sprouting in shopping malls. Customers include parents concerned about the poor quality of their children's education and teachers whose schools will not purchase the materials they want. Thirteen years ago Kay Fredericks, then a school teacher, helped found Trend Enterprises of St. Paul, Minnesota. "When we first started there were 15 to 20 companies in the market," recalls Fredericks. "Now there are hundreds."

Trend's products are aimed at elementary school children. The company produces a dozen different bingo games that use numbers and letters and sell for about six dollars. In another kind of Trend game, students draw pictures by connecting dots that are labeled with letters. Milton Bradley, the toymaker, has entered the field with a "count your change" game selling for around six dollars. Binney & Smith, which produces Crayola crayons, makes flash cards with words on them like "birthday" and "out."

At the Teachers Store, sponsored by the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, hundreds of teachers line up to purchase such colorfully packaged games and exercises at the start of the school year. Many pay for the materials out of their own pockets. "These things make the teachers' lives a little easier," says Paul Heller, manager of the store. "They are desperate for ways to reach the kids."

Milliken Publishing Company of St. Louis produces a wide range of duplicating books that sell for about $4.25. In one Milliken exercise the page is divided into three columns headed "yesterday," "today," and



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"tomorrow." On the left side is a picture of a boy running and at the bottom is a group of words. The student is expected to select "run," "ran," and "will run" from the list and paste them in the correct boxes. Another Milliken booklet has 50 awards, contracts, and messages. One citation looks like a diploma and says "110% award." At the top of the duplicating master is a picture of a trophy and below are lines to inscribe the winner's name and why the prize was presented.

Companies constantly are seeking new concepts to market. Xerox, for example, developed map skills booklets, a product teachers previously had done without. One booklet begins with pictures of globes and a brief description of how they can be used. After reading the material students are asked to fill in the blanks for sentences such as "The imaginary point farthest north on the Earth is called the _____." Aggressive developing of new products has kept the industry growing. Operating in a difficult period, the education companies have proved their resilience. The future now seems even brighter. In the 1980s school enrollment will climb again, the educational market should expand accordingly, and is guaranteed to unload more _____ on the nation's schools.

**Stan Luxenberg**

*Stan Luxenberg* is a New York freelance writer.

The silliest regulatory agency in Washington.

# Life Inside the PRC

*Interested parties gathered recently under the Great Seal of the Postal Rate Commission to listen to lawyers for the Postal Service cross-examined by lawyers for large companies affected by postal rates (known as "intervenors"), who in turn cross-examined each other and any other lawyers trapped in the hearing room. This followed seven earlier stages in the proceedings, including lengthy cross-examination of Postal Service employees asked to take the stand as "pre-sort witnesses" or "volume witnesses." "Rebuttal testimony," the "briefing period," and the decision itself are still a few winks down the road. (See Table 1, supplied by the Postal Rate Commission.) The National Association of Greeting Card Publishers expects to spend more than $125,000 intervening in Postal Rate Commission controversies this year.*

When it's all over, this postal rate case will likely end up where most of its predecessors have: in federal court. Some unlucky soul will have to wheel all the evidentiary tonnage to a courthouse across town.

None of this is so strange in Washington, where lawyers for government and business sleepwalk through these kinds of roles every day. The difference is that at this regulatory agency it's all make-believe. And like a versatile comic actor, the government plays almost every major part.

The Postal Rate Commission (PRC to friends) came to life during that great leap forward known as the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970. The aim was to turn the old and creaky US Post Office into what many Americans believe to be the most efficient force known to man: a corporation run on "sound business principles." The nation lost a Cabinet-level department and gained a quasi-public, quasi-private pushmi-pullyu of a beast known as the US Postal Service. Having created a mock corporation—complete with fancy offices and salaries, advertising jingles, and so on, lacking only that element of turning a profit—Congress then created a mock regulatory agency to look after it. Like the big boys along Pennsylvania Avenue, the PRC has commissioners, five of them, at $52,750 a year (more for the chairman), each with his or her own plush office and a soft-edged studio photograph in the lobby. And it has the support staff and the hearing rooms. But unlike the Federal Trade Commission and the Interstate Commerce Commission, which supervise huge chunks of the economy, the Postal Rate Commission has only one "company" to regulate: the Postal Service.

Nevertheless, the PRC takes its job very seriously. And each decision it makes takes so long that its platter is never empty. A new rate increase application always comes along before the last one has been thoroughly chewed over. No postal rate or mail classification changes without at least a two-foot stack of documents and complex economic models that measure the costs attributable to each kind of mail service. The law is clear: kill the trees, crank out the "evidence."

But there is a catch. The Postal Service is presided over by a board of governors, and that august group—chaired by M.A. Wright, president of Exxon, and now enjoying the service of Joseph Califano as its counsel ($23,000 in fees for the month of July)—can by unanimous vote modify or reject any PRC decision. In fact, the PRC's ruling is just an early step in setting postal rates. (See Table 2, also supplied by the PRC.)

A. Lee Fritschler, PRC chairman, insists that the Postal Service governors exercise their right to overrule only rarely. But earlier this year it happened on an important case related to the use of an electronic mail system by the Postal Service, which generated 50 intervenors and 10,000 pages of PRC transcripts. In their decision, the governors, who meet once a month, reminded the commissioners, who claim to scrutinize postal issues full-time, that "unlike other administrative agencies, it [the PRC] does not have a broad power to regulate."

That's a bureaucratic way of saying buzz off, but


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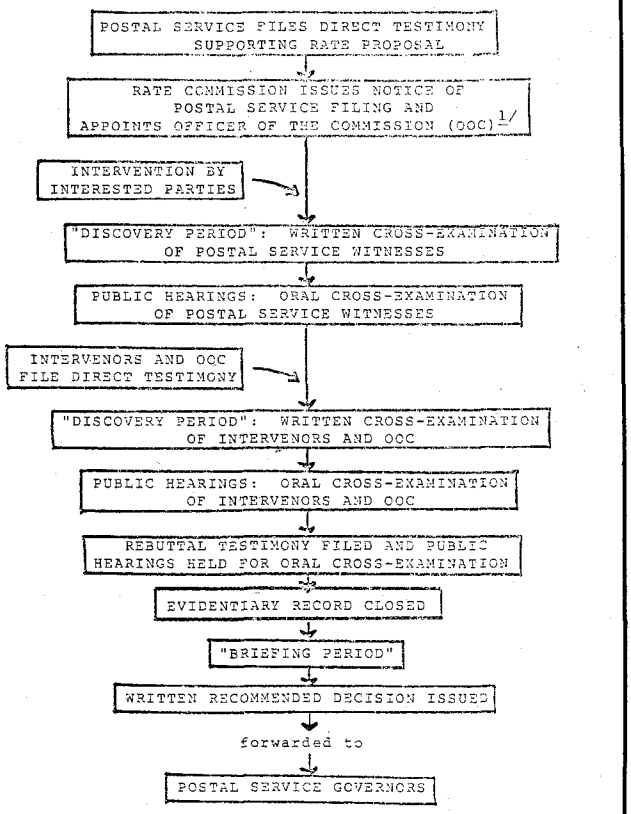
TABLE 1

POSTAL RATE COMMISSION DECISIONAL PROCEDURE
IN RATE CASES


POSTAL SERVICE FILES DIRECT TESTIMONY SUPPORTING RATE PROPOSAL
RATE COMMISSION ISSUES NOTICE OF POSTAL SERVICE FILING AND APPOINTS OFFICER OF THE COMMISSION (OOC) 1/
INTERVENTION BY INTERESTED PARTIES
"DISCOVERY PERIOD": WRITTEN CROSS-EXAMINATION OF POSTAL SERVICE WITNESSES
PUBLIC HEARINGS: ORAL CROSS-EXAMINATION OF POSTAL SERVICE WITNESSES
INTERVENORS AND OOC FILE DIRECT TESTIMONY
"DISCOVERY PERIOD": WRITTEN CROSS-EXAMINATION OF INTERVENORS AND OOC
PUBLIC HEARINGS: ORAL CROSS-EXAMINATION OF INTERVENORS AND OOC
REBUTTAL TESTIMONY FILED AND PUBLIC HEARINGS HELD FOR ORAL CROSS-EXAMINATION
EVIDENTIARY RECORD CLOSED
"BRIEFING PERIOD"
WRITTEN RECOMMENDED DECISION ISSUED
forwarded to
POSTAL SERVICE GOVERNORS

1/ This Office represents the interests of the general public before the Commission (See 39 USC 3624 a).

Fritschler, a former American University dean who spent his academic career studying how regulation is supposed to work, doesn't scare easily. He has no intention of letting his regulatory agency become a captive of industry . . . er . . . government. Already, he has shown more signs of aggressiveness than many of his rubber-stamping predecessors. Some postal pundits say the Commission might even rule against the Postal Service in the current rate case, which features the prospect of a 20-cent first-class stamp.

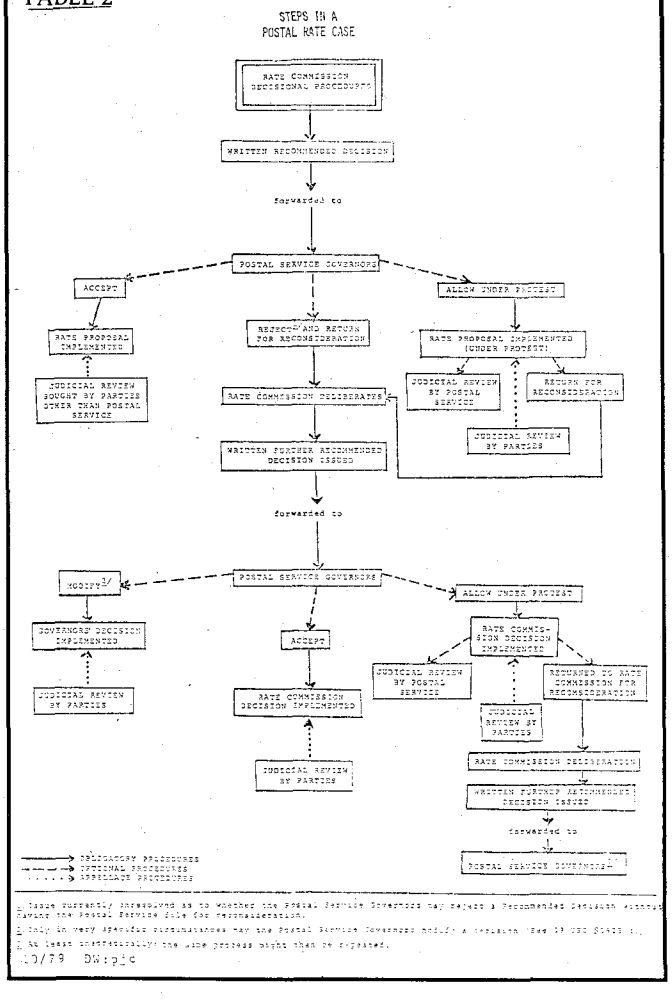
Like the grown-up regulatory agencies, the PRC has made a great fuss since the beginning about preserving its "independence" from the "industry" it is supposed to regulate. The Commission's first chairman, William J. Crowley, went so far as to avoid taking the same elevators used by Postal Service management. He also refused to eat in the Postal Service's cafeteria for fear of inadvertantly colluding with those he regulated while reaching for the Jello. That problem was ostensibly solved in the mid-1970s by moving the PRC out of Postal headquarters and 20 long blocks downtown.

Now, however, there's someone else for the Postal Rate Commissioners to avoid on the way to the men's room. He's called—ready?—"The Officer of the Office of the Commission," and he's charged with representing the "general public" in rate and classification proceedings. His office, the Office of the Commission, is located on the sixth floor of the office building which houses the PRC on the fifth. Woe unto the OOC employee who ventures downstairs to talk of anything more important than the need for a sixth-floor carpet shampoo, lest a pending case be prejudiced by contact with the "general public."

The Officer of the Office of the Commission is an illogical extension of the due process adversary system by which all the federal regulatory agencies function. To serve the public better, the Post Office is turned into the Postal Service. Then, to protect the public interest in the Postal Service, the Postal Rate Commission is created to review all the Postal Service's actions. Before the Postal Rate Commission can make a move, it must hold elaborate hearings with participation from "interested parties." The theory is that the battle of the interested parties will produce all the facts and arguments the commissioners need to produce a just decision. But the only parties interested enough to hire lawyers at $150 an hour for weeks on end are major mailers like magazine publishers and the Postal Services's competitors like United Parcel Service. So the Commission itself hires lawyers to represent the interest of the general public. But what interest is the PRC itself serving? And if a small office one floor up can figure out what is best for the "general public," what is the point of the entire adversary exercise going on downstairs? In effect a basic and fairly simple deci-

TABLE 2

STEPS IN A
POSTAL RATE CASE




1/ Issue currently unresolved as to whether the Postal Service Governors may reject a recommended decision without having the Postal Service file for reconsideration.

2/ Only in very specific circumstances may the Postal Service Governors modify a decision (See 39 USC Sect. 3).

3/ At least theoretically the same process might then be repeated.

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sion of government—how much should postage stamps cost?—is being made by the staging of epic mock trials in which the government is paying for most of the lawyers and all the judges.

A few years ago, Representative Paul Simon, Democrat of Illinois, actually tried to scrap the Postal Rate Commission and have Congress set postal rates as it did before 1970. But Simon's colleagues were not eager to take back the no-win responsibility for postal rates. So due process has continued to run amok, as it inevitably does when lawyers turn their minds to reform. Pretty soon, you'll need an advanced degree to figure out what's going on at the Postal Rate Commission.

That's no joke. Over the summer, Chairman Fritschler formed a new "Postal Doctoral Dissertation Board." Its purpose is to give grants to graduate students canny enough to realize that becoming a postal expert is not a bad way to put a little food next to all those job rejection letters on the table.

**Jonathan Alter**

*Jonathan Alter* is a Washington writer.

Thinking the unthinkable.

# The New Brinksmanship

## by Tad Szulc

For the first time since the 1950s, the possibility of nuclear war with the Soviet Union appears to be seriously accepted by key figures inside and outside the US government. What long have been unthinkable thoughts now are entertained by influential men and women in Washington. Meanwhile the Carter administration is moving apace with measures designed to prepare the US—and US public opinion—for the contingency of major wars. It is a new phenomenon, based on the hardening conclusion that the Soviet Union's overwhelming concern, aside from a determination to achieve strategic superiority over the US, centers on assuring itself of military endurance and survival as a functioning society after a protracted nuclear exchange. A senior White House foreign policy specialist says: "In 30 years, I never thought war was really possible: now I think it *is* possible—if not necessarily probable."

What does it all mean and where does it lead? Is it a question of correct or incorrect perceptions held by officials in Washington and Moscow? What are the implicit dangers of such attitudes? There are no precise answers to these questions. But certain realities are observable. In the US, the military response to the perceived Soviet threat includes the go-ahead for the MX mobile missile system, the work on the "invisible" Stealth bomber, a controversial shift in nuclear targeting strategy against the Soviet Union, recent decisions to accelerate the production of weapons-grade plutonium, and the restoration of US chemical warfare capability. These preparations are developing in a new psychological climate that has evolved steadily since early 1980 and goes well beyond the forums of the presidential campaign.

The new climate, dampening the euphoria of the Soviet-American detente of the last decade, can be traced to the mounting evidence of the build-up of Soviet nuclear and conventional forces, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan last December, and, most recently, the dangers surrounding the current Persian Gulf hostilities. Thoughtful analysts at the Pentagon and the National Security Council staff emphasize Soviet advances in the accuracy of their huge SS-18 missiles (plus the fact that their throw-weight greatly exceeds that of US intercontinental missiles), the deployment of medium-range SS-20 missiles in Europe, and the direct involvement of combat forces beyond Soviet borders, from Angola and Ethiopia to Afghanistan. "The grand development in recent years by the Soviets is the projection of their power into the world," says a senior Pentagon expert. And frequent and unexplained movements of Soviet troops have worried the administration and have led to secret alerts by US armed forces this year.

The result of all this is that the hawks and doves in and out of the government nowadays speak in strikingly similar language about the inexorable deterioration in Soviet-American relations and its long-range consequences—although their points of emphasis vary. Of course nobody in Washington desires or actually predicts a nuclear war. But the Carter administration—and the Reagan team—are proceeding along a



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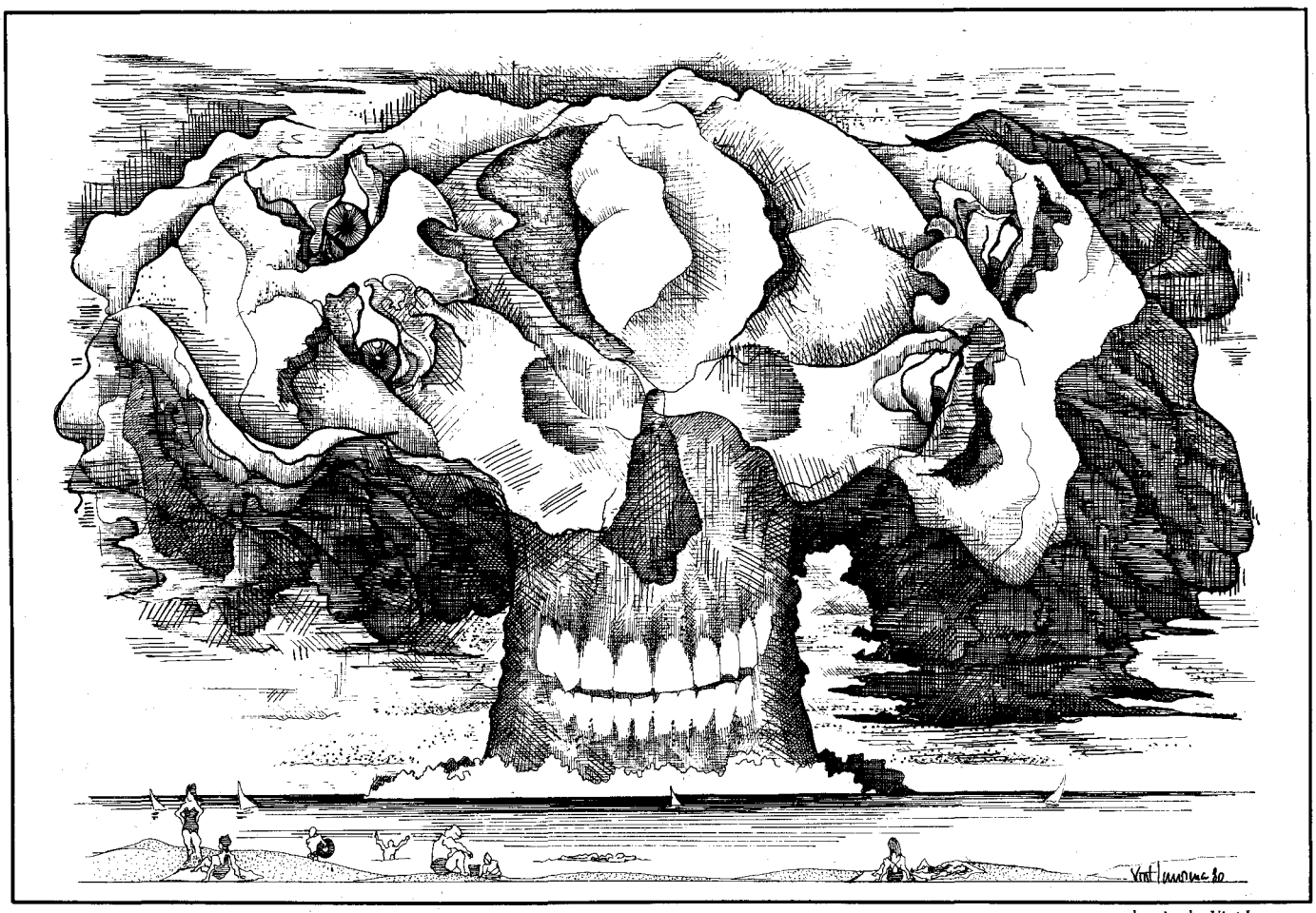

drawing by Vint Lawrence

double track. There is a desire on both sides to obtain some kind of SALT agreement to limit nuclear arsenals (if it is acceptable to the Senate in its present form or if Moscow is prepared to negotiate a Reagan-inspired text). Yet at the same time there is a clear disposition to strengthen US defenses through all available means.

President Carter set forth his philosophy of nuclear war at a news conference on September 18, explaining the reasons for setting in motion the development of the MX missile and for the new concept of strategic targeting of the Soviet Union. "It's crucial for our nation, for our allies, and for our potential adversaries to know that if necessary atomic weapons would be used to defend our nation," said Carter. "And that knowledge is the deterrent that would prevent a potential adversary from attacking our country, and therefore destroying a hundred million or more American lives. . . . There is a likelihood—I can't say how strong it might be; it's not an inevitability but it's certainly a likelihood—that if an atomic exchange of any kind should ever erupt, that it might lead to a more massive exchange of intercontinental and highly destructive weapons that would result in tens of millions of lost lives on both sides. . . . If necessary to defend the freedom and security of Western Europe and this country, then I would use atomic weapons." And in a campaign speech on October 16, the president returned to the subject of nuclear war. If "potential adversaries . . . attacked the United States of America," he said, "they will be committing suicide."

Underlying this statement are Carter administration assurances (questioned by his critics) that an essential strategic equivalence currently exists between the United States and the Soviet Union. The administration's view is that superiority by either side (Reagan argues for US superiority) is destabilizing, and all its new strategic measures are intended to maintain this balance. While the Soviet Union leads in the number of strategic missile launchers, the United States is ahead in warheads. The present count (verified under SALT I procedures) is 1,398 land-based intercontinental ballistic missile launchers and 950 submarine-launched ballistic missiles for the Soviet Union, and 1,054 ICBM launchers and 656 SLBM launchers for the United States. But the United States has 10,000 nuclear warheads and the Soviet Union only 6,000. America also can deploy the air-launched cruise missile, permitting great accuracy in targeting.

These weapons ceilings would be maintained proportionately under SALT II, if ratified, and Carter's point is that if the treaty were allowed to die, the Soviets no longer would be under numerical constraints. There are, of course, differing schools of thought as to the validity of SALT-imposed quantitative limits, and the argument (even within the administration) is that what really matters is the qualitative technological state of the nuclear arsenals.



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This has led to a concern that the Soviets have caught up or are about to catch up with the United States in nuclear technology. The central element is missile accuracy. The US, using such super-sophisticated course-correcting systems on its MIRVed missiles as "Stellar Update" (a major guidance achievement), can hit a target with extraordinary accuracy —within 500 yards or less—under what is known as the Circular Error of Probability. But the US Intelligence community believes that the Russians are coming close to this capability.

If they do, American specialists fear that the Soviet Union could be tempted to take out US land-based ICBM launchers in a highly precise counterforce strike (an attack on weapons systems as opposed to civilian targets), upsetting the strategic balance. This is why more and more US experts no longer discount the possibility of a Soviet nuclear attack, judging that the Soviet Union is willing to risk an atomic exchange and believes it can survive a submarine-launched US second strike. The vast Soviet effort in civil defense, barely matched by the US, is seen as confirmation of such strategic thinking.

AMERICAN RESPONSES to this new strategic "ballgame," as Pentagon and White House officials describe it, are both long term and immediate. All, however, are the product of evolution in US strategic philosophy, stemming from the recognition that Moscow now possesses capabilities endangering the US. The administration seems to have decided that the time has come to reveal in an orchestrated variety of ways, including "leaks" to the press, the countermeasures it is applying as signals to both the Soviet Union and a disturbed domestic public opinion.

The decision to proceed with the mobile MX system, expected to cost upward of $50 billion and still greatly controversial among specialists and politicians, relates directly to Soviet breakthroughs in missile accuracy. The idea is that US Minuteman ICBMs would be less vulnerable to a Soviet counterforce strike if they could be moved continuously from silo to silo over a huge area in Utah and Nevada, keeping the Soviet targeters guessing at their location. The MX, however, poses two problems. One is that it may push the Soviets to create their own mobile missile system, which the US strenuously opposed during SALT I negotiations. The other is that the MX and the full force of Trident submarines are unlikely to be operational before the end of the 1980s. The best US intelligence estimates are that the critical nuclear confrontation period may come as early as 1985.

This notion has led Carter to sign, probably last July, Presidential Directive 59, which adds a large number of Soviet military targets—ICBM silos, bomber bases, and submarine bases—and military and political command and control centers to the present list of Soviet objectives on the American strategic list. PD-59, which comes under the rubric of immediate measures, has created a major controversy among US experts as to its meaning and effectiveness, and it has resulted in bitter Soviet protests.

Much of the confusion over PD-59 results from the fact that its full text never has been made public (it remains a closely guarded secret in the White House and the upper reaches of the Pentagon). What is known of the PD-59 document is confined to incomplete material leaked to newspapers in the same fashion as the Defense Department revealed the development of the Stealth bomber.

The administration confirms that, broadly speaking, PD-59 is the US response to the menace of a Soviet counterforce strike at American Minuteman and Titan silos. It asserts that PD-59 is intended as the latest deterrent in the nuclear game with the Soviet Union (this was the sense of Carter's answer at the September news conference) and that it represents the culmination of studies conducted by it since 1977. These studies were a follow-up on counterforce concerns expressed by former defense secretary James R. Schlesinger as far back as 1974 as well as on the so-called "Team B" exercise conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1975 to assess Soviet strategic advances. "Team B," made up of outside experts with full access to classified information, convinced the Ford administration that the Russians were much further ahead in strategic technology than the CIA's own "Team A" had concluded on the basis of the same materials. Some experts believe that PD-59 is an outgrowth of the "Team B" work; others insist that Team B was wholly wrong in its conclusions and that therefore the PD-59 concept is equally flawed.

BEYOND THESE points, interpretations of PD-59 vary widely among US specialists. Many insist that PD-59 has simply codified what already had been an evolving US targeting policy. Targeting is constantly updated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Strategic Air Command under the Single Integrated Operations Plan. Prior to PD-59, the current SIOP included between 140 and 200 major Soviet targets, among them cities and military and economic objectives. PD-59, it is understood, has added at least 10 crucial targets, chiefly Soviet military and civilian command and control centers.

The majority view, however, is that PD-59 constitutes a significant strategic milestone. It formally does away with the old Mutual Assured Destruction doctrine, under which US and Soviet cities were held hostages in a massive nuclear exchange, by introducing the concept of Limited Nuclear Options that Secretary of Defense Harold Brown says the president must have available in an emergency. But contrary to statements by both Carter and Brown, PD-59 does not suggest the likelihood of a limited nuclear war because in the views of both the US and the Soviet Union no such conflict can be confined to a single counterforce exchange.



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A protracted nuclear war thus appears to be the equation faced by the two superpowers as PD-59 emerges in response to similar Soviet thinking. In the opinion of many US experts, this new equation may result in an increase in nuclear forces on both sides, each seeking to use its deterrent to discourage a first strike by the other side. But it has been argued that this doctrine, as applied by the US and the Soviets, could get out of hand at any given moment, especially if one perceives that nuclear superiority is shifting to the other.

MOSCOW'S SHRILL denunciations of PD-59 have suggested to observers that it is seen by the Kremlin as the confirmation of its worst fears, that the US may be contemplating a first strike to destroy its ICBMs, and, above all, its political and military leadership on all levels. How Moscow will react to PD-59 is the next step in the nuclear chess game.

The administration insists that it is not deliberately creating a warmongering atmosphere, preferring instead to characterize its actions as simply responsive to new Soviet nuclear realities. Nevertheless there clearly is an effort by the administration, quietly applauded by influential personalities outside, to show its careful consideration of the possibility of a protracted nuclear war.

Thus, as early as November 15, 1979, Carter issued the PD-53 on "National Security Telecommunications Policy," proclaiming that "it is essential to the security of the US to have telecommunications facilities adequate to satisfy the needs of the nation during and after any national emergency" and to "provide continuity of essential functions of government, and to reconstitute the political, economic, and social structure of the nation." PD-53's principal goal was described as providing for the "connectivity between the National Command Authority and strategic and other appropriate forces to support flexible execution of retaliatory strikes during and after an enemy nuclear attack."

PD-53, suggesting that the US accepts the likelihood of a protracted war, was followed last July by PD-58, which set forth plans for protecting American leaders in a nuclear war. In the absence of a Soviet-type civil defense network in the US, PD-58 called for a rapid evacuation from Washington of the president and other top military and civilian leaders to underground command posts and aboard AWAC aircraft. PD-59 was issued to complete the set of new detailed instructions to deal with a protracted nuclear war in which Soviet strategic forces and leadership might become chief targets. A separate section of PD-59, not leaked to the press, discusses the ways in which US commanders in Europe might activate tactical nuclear weapons if "connectivity" with the president is lost in an initial nuclear exchange.

The issuance of PD-59 was followed in September by a decision within the administration to accelerate the production of weapons-grade plutonium in the US for the first time in 20 years to meet new strategic requirements. The Congress already has authorized funds for it. Taken together, all these decisions strongly indicate that the Carter administration no longer rules out a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Another straw in the wind is the study within the administration of a new antiballistic missile system, intended principally to protect the MX deployments. This would lead to the abandonment of the 10-year ABM treaty signed with the Soviets under SALT I in 1972. But the Soviets are also known to be testing what may develop into their new ABM system.

If counterforce attacks are to be key elements in the new strategic equation, it is illusory to believe that it would limit greatly the number of civilian deaths. Because most Soviet ICBM sites and air and naval bases are near populated centers, a US counterforce attack could result in between 3.7 and 27.7 million fatalities on the first day, according to a 1979 study by the Congress's Office of Technology Assessment. This range is related to the degree to which Soviet populations may have time to seek shelter, and to manner of weapon utilization (ground or air bursts). In a Soviet attack on US strategic forces, the OTA has projected fatalities between two and 22 million Americans, depending on roughly similar factors.

OTHER EXPERTS believe that a US attack on Soviet strategic targets would result in a counterstrike against American cities. This is one factor that has led to criticism of the PD-59 doctrine. Another criticism, expressed by Air Force commanders, is that the US currently lacks the capability for an effective counterforce strategy.

Finally, the Carter administration is preparing for other forms of unconventional warfare. In September, Congress approved over three million dollars in funds requested by the administration to erect a plant for the production of nerve gas. A decade ago, the US along with the Soviet Union renounced first use of chemical or bacteriological weapons, but Pentagon experts now believe that Moscow has been actively working on both, and that America is lagging behind dangerously. In the end, the US may devote four billion dollars to the resurgence of the chemical warfare program.

The question is whether the chances of a nuclear war are enhanced by the technological race on both sides and all the related preparations, and how, ultimately, their plans may be affected by mutual perceptions. Again, nobody in Washington has a clear answer. But a senior administration official summed up the current situation when he remarked in private that "we wouldn't be taking these steps if we did not feel the US was endangered." And the mood in the capital seems to reflect this sentiment, despite warnings from many quarters about the perils of the US becoming engulfed in a war atmosphere, with all its attendant risks.


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# Books and the Arts

## Stanley Kauffmann on films

### Two for the Rote

Between me and the screen, as I managed to stay awake through *Melvin and Howard*, floated adjectives—from reviews of the film. I hadn't seen it at its New York Film Festival première, but I had seen some reviews, and now there were those adjectives. "Brilliant," inevitably, and "splendid" and "lyrical" and "most expansive." And a chilling phrase: "Just about as good as American films get." The situation in film criticism is becoming much like that in theater criticism: any American who shows the slightest wisp of talent, who is not utterly hopeless, gets wheeled right up to the pumping station for inflation. In the theater it's playwrights, some late examples being Lanford Wilson, Steve Tesich, and Albert Innaurato. In film it's directors, this week's example being Jonathan Demme.

The biggest trouble with *Melvin and Howard* is not Demme's commonplace work, however; it's the script by Bo Goldman, co-adapter of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a picture whose screenplay was not its ace achievement. Goldman's impetus was that strange story about Howard Hughes and the Nevada auto mechanic, Melvin Dummar. The mechanic picked up what looked like a grizzled derelict who lay injured in the desert, drove him to Las Vegas while the old man consented to sing along with him and told him he was Howard Hughes, then dropped the old man at the back door of a lush hotel. Some time later, after Hughes's death, a handwritten will was delivered to Melvin, purportedly written by Hughes, making the mechanic heir to $156 million. (This will was subsequently declared invalid.)

Now this is a beginning, with an eccentric billionaire; and it's an ending, with the tumult bursting on Melvin. But it's not a middle. Between the beginning and the end comes about 80 percent of the picture, in which there is nothing but Melvin's life; and Melvin isn't very engrossing. Probably all the facts are true—his marital troubles, his wife's winning money on a TV show, his troubles as a milkman—but it doesn't follow that a film had to be made of them just because, before and after, some interesting things happened to him.

Most of what we see is typical, not to the point of epitome but of the humdrum. No one who has been going to films in the last 10 years, let alone keeping eyes and ears open in the world, would have trouble writing that main 80 percent. Trailer living, cheap ornate décor, junk food, twangy dialogue always straining toward dumb-animal poignancy, TV addiction, TV-addicted kids, all with an underpinning of pop music. How often do we have to go through it, in big-budget pious inquiry? *White Line Fever*, the early sections of *Five Easy Pieces*, *Urban Cowboy*, much of *Nashville* are only a very few of the antecedents.

Apparently the middle-class and upper-middle people who make films and who write about them can't get enough of all this slumming—and slumming is how it comes out. This is not how it came out in the first half of *Coal Miner's Daughter*; there the character and narrative elements were so strong that the milieu was integrated as part of them. In *M & H* the characters and narrative are so dull that only the backgrounds are vivid, so it seems as if the film was made for their sake; and since those backgrounds are far from novel, it's tedious. The supposedly distinctive touches, again possibly factual, don't help. Make the errant wife a stripper, and the filmmakers' and reviewers' cockles warm even more at the seamy truth of it all. (And if one of her co-strippers has an arm in a cast, well, how many of the audience will have seen the orgy sketch in *Oh, Calcutta?*)

Demme was wildly hailed for his last film, *Handle with Care*, which was stuffed with prole carryings-on and crotchets, neither new nor illuminating, simply amassed. He's at it again here. Paul Le Mat has all the necessary undistinction for the role of Melvin. The wooziness of Mary Steenburgen as his first wife is a bit more cozily ensconced here than previously. Jason Robards, in an engorged cameo bit as Hughes, is at least trenchant.

My withers are not more automatically wrung by people who live around automobile graveyards than they are by the travails of the Jay Presson Allen set with its desperate chic—in *It's My Turn*, for instance. Verisimilitude as such, in one stratum or another, means nothing. Demme is noticeably more concerned about human beings than Allen, but he still relies on accurate trappings, as she does, to "be" his picture. The very poverty of the script betrays the false emphasis, the willingness to settle for Melvin's diddly doings as most of the story. Imagine a film about Mr. Deeds before he inherits the money and goes to town.

*The Stunt Man* strains more, a lot more, but substantively it ends up not much

### Films Worth Seeing

*Airplane!* Just what you'd always wanted to happen in an airplane disaster picture: chaos. Hilarious chaos. Skyhigh jinks.

*The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith.* A rich and excellently acted Australian film about a half-caste abused into murder, c. 1900. If it fails to reach tragedy, it reaches quite a lot.

*Every Man For Himself.* Welcome back to the irritating/irreplaceable Jean-Luc Godard, testing once again the boundaries of filmmaking and of narrative. More an aesthetic protest than a film, but it's *alive.*

*Kagemusha.* A genius returns. Akira Kurosawa's new film about 16th-century Japanese warriors doesn't reach the heights of his *Seven Samurai*, but it's magnificent.

**SK**



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further on. It's at a far end of the spectrum from *M & H*: Demme's picture tries to succeed by a kind of photojournalism, but *The Stunt Man* flails away with contrivances to construct an allegory.

Steve Railsback is on the lam from the police in the countryside. He stumbles into territory where a war film is being made. (Hang on.) The director, Peter O'Toole, spots him, discerns a strange, dangerous quality in him, and engages him as chief stunt man for the picture. The plot provides O'Toole with a means for throwing the police off the scent and giving Railsback a new identity. (And, as we suspected, when Railsback tells us the reason why the cops are after him, he comes out a Good Guy. So it's all neat.) What's more, Railsback gets a girl. The female star of the film and he go for each other and into bed and into the future together. Why this is more serious than his affair with the makeup woman that precedes it is not really demonstrated: rather, it's demonstrated tacitly, by means of unspoken film code. The makeup woman is a minor part, and the true love played by the star, Barbara Hershey; so the banging of the former means nothing, of the latter everything.

Lots of little questions along the way. When did Railsback rehearse the very complex action sequences that we see him doing? Who can believe that Hershey is the deep woman she is said to be? Isn't the suppression of the facts about an earlier stunt man's death really a quite serious crime on the part of O'Toole and colleagues? Won't the dead man's family and friends start an inquiry that will rock Railsback's new security?

A more serious flaw. The film depends much on our thinking the director is a genius. (Your little nephew Willie will know that John Huston is being suggested.) But what is this film that he's making and around which he's making huge windy comments? Ordinary action nonsense; and the two leading actors—in *his* film, that is—seem incapable of anything more. In *Twentieth Century* John Barrymore is a theater director of genius and the play he's working on at the start is claptrap, but he's shown to be marvelous with *actors*, as was the David Belasco of whom the role is a cartoon. In *The Stunt Man* O'Toole talks a great game of the magic and mystery of film, and what we see are mostly rooftop chases, à la Richard Talmadge 1925.

All these flaws might fade if not for the great flaw. The huff-and-puff construction of the allegory doesn't lead to much. The screenplay is by Lawrence B. Marcus from a novel by Paul Brodeur that I couldn't finish, because *it* huffed and puffed sententiously. The best version of a central idea that I can come up with, out of the film, is: the make-believe of movies provides a new reality for Railsback. Aside from the flimsiness of the plot, that trite idea would need a much stronger, cleaner rendition to make it cogent yet again. Films about film are about as old as film itself. Chaplin's fifth short, *A Film Johnnie* (March 1914), was a "backstage" picture, and it wasn't the first of its kind. Among the very best: Fellini's *8½*, Keaton's *Sherlock Junior* and *The Cameraman*, all of which treat the subject with, to put it minimally, greater felicity than *The Stunt Man*.

Felicity is not in Richard Rush, the director. Even with the script's big and little defects, his film might be tolerable if it weren't so portentous and mannered. The opening shots of a buzzard and a sleeping dog, visibly labeled Symbols but devoid of relevance; the ridiculously cryptic disclosures of the pertinent facts of the story; the freighted intercutting of faces that is freightless; the shooting through gauze; the sudden appearance to a man on a bridge of another man at eye-level in a helicopter; the sudden lifts and drops of O'Toole on camera cranes (to make the director a deus ex machina, naturally)—no tenfold-better script could survive this heavy treatment. No twofold-better director would be suckered by it.

Railsback is one more of the latter-day crop of unmemorable faces, Timothy Bottoms and Paul Le Mat being two others, leading actors whose faces don't repay the camera's close attention. However, Railsback does show an occasional sign of inner torque. Hershey doesn't. She was an attractive adolescent in *Last Summer* 10 years ago; she has grown into an insipid woman. The one good scene in the film is the first meeting between Railsback and Chuck Bail, the chief of stunt men, which is a subtle piece of homosexual flirtation. And the only person who gives an extraordinary performance is, unsurprisingly, Peter O'Toole.

Richard Burton or Nicol Williamson or Trevor Howard might have done it. (Not Jason Robards: he doesn't know how to sustain a long line to its end.) O'Toole did it. A fine speaker of verse


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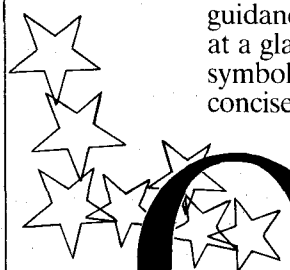

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speaking consciously ornate prose (written in the tradition of Ben Hecht, a reporter's barroom eloquence). A fine actor playing a man who is, in his life, a performer. O'Toole chews up the cast around him, the picture itself, as fodder for his performance, which seems a very good bargain.

O, O'Toole, if only you chose better scripts! *The Stunt Man* makes at least the third of your films that are worth seeing chiefly for your acting, the others being *Brotherly Love* and *The Ruling Class*. And, marginally, *Caligula*—a smaller role. Will you ever find a script that is, approximately, as good as you are? I pause—not too long, I hope—for a reply.

Reconsideration.

# A Novel of the Beat Generation

## by James Atlas

Literary historians share with botanists an impulse to classify, to break down the productions of any given era into taxonomies of influence, generation, group. Thus the Lost Generation—a title bestowed on Ernest Hemingway by Gertrude Stein—was succeeded by the generation that came of age during the Depression (one that has so far been denied a name, though it possesses a distinct identity); and they were succeeded by the Beat Generation. In such a scheme, contemporary history figures as the force that disrupts the lives of writers in their impressionable youths, sends them off to war or disillusions them, and convinces them of their essential alienation from society.

So it has been in our century. "We weren't destined to have the fate of the usual college generation," claimed Malcolm Cowley in *Exile's Return*, writing of the 1920s. "Without jobs," recalled William Barrett in a memoir of the 1930s, "the young were not chained immediately to the wheel of career and profession." The years just after World War II, noted John Clellon Holmes in his account of the Beats, *Nothing More to Declare*, were characterized by a "feeling of expectation without reasonable hope, of recklessness without motivation, of uniqueness seeking an image." That quest for an image by which to define their collective experience informs so many American memoirs it is as if the very absence of a shared literary tradition has prompted us to invent our own.

Still, generations do possess recognizable features, and John Clellon Holmes was among the first to reflect on the temper of the postwar era. *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac's definitive chronicle of nihilism and *anomie*, was published in 1957—the year that Norman Mailer, working the same terrain, delineated the character of the White Negro, impelled "to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey with the rebellious imperatives of the self." But Holmes was at work on his autobiographical novel, *Go*, as early as 1949, and Kerouac had just finished *The Town and the City*, a sprawling American *Bildungsroman* that owed more to Thomas Wolfe than to any New York postwar mood and had none of the hopped-up, fast-talking hipsters who populate his later work.

Before the beats had become the Beats—that occurred later on in the 1950s, after the publication of *On the Road*—Holmes charted in *Go* their manic exploration of the unconscious, their feverish quest for experience, their glorification of crime. It was he who introduced that generation—and, in collaboration with Kerouac, the term that would define it. They had met at Allen Ginsberg's apartment in Spanish Harlem one night during the summer of 1948, when Kerouac was 26 and Holmes was an aspiring novelist of 22. At the time, Kerouac was living with his mother in Ozone Park on Long Island, and used to come in for occasional restorative bouts of dissipation. One night that autumn Holmes and Kerouac were sitting around Holmes's apartment on Lexington Avenue meditating on their friends' attributes, their "weariness with all the forms, all the conventions of the world." And it was then, with "a conspiratorial the-Shadow-knows kind of laugh," Holmes recalled, that Kerouac proposed the idea of a "beat generation." The phrase made its way into *Go* and Gilbert Millstein, who had reviewed the novel in the *New York Times*, commissioned an article for the *Times* magazine on the distinctive features of the generation it described.

The article ("This is the Beat Generation," November 16, 1952) attracted more attention than the novel itself, and provided the earliest portraits of people soon to become famous. Readers of Kerouac or of the many books about him will recognize the characters in *Go*: David Stofsky, the voluble, wild-eyed poet whose visitations from Blake and mad babble have since become the lore of Allen Ginsberg; Gene Pasternak, urging his friends "to live, *live*!" and rushing off to California, is Holmes's version of Kerouac; and a number of the other minor characters—Albert Ancke as the hustler and small-time underworld figure Herbert Huncke; Hart Kennedy as the legendary Neal Cassady, whose fabled sexual charisma and pathological energy Kerouac depicted in *On the Road* in the person of Dean Moriarty—were made notorious by Kerouac's novels. "The facts (if not the insights) there are as accurate as one friend dares to be about the inner life of another," Holmes claimed in *Nothing More to Declare*, defending his portrait of Ginsberg; and he was no less biographical, one suspects, in his other portraits. Holmes's claim that *Go* is "almost literal truth" can be verified in Dennis McNally's *Desolate Angel*, John Tytell's *Naked Angels*, or the "oral biography" of Kerouac by Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee.

What distinguishes *Go* from Kerouac's own hectic testimony is its sobriety. Not that Paul Hobbes, Holmes's persona, is any less dissipated than his friends, any less susceptible to the blandishments of squandered evenings at nightclubs or drunken parties. But he is skeptical, conservative, unpersuaded by the ephemeral delight his friends derive

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*James Atlas* is an editor at the *New York Times Book Review*. This essay appears as a foreword to *Go*, by John Clellon Holmes (New American Library, Plume Book, ©1980 by NAL, Inc.).



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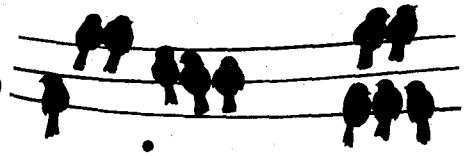
# A man who writes about reading, a woman who listens to kids, two gifted historians, the whole class of birds, and 442 American women will all be leaving Harvard this fall.



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from their indulgences. A solemn, industrious writer intent on salvaging his marriage, Hobbes is a reluctant participant in what Holmes elsewhere has called "futility rites"; he is a mere tourist in the underworld nightlife of Times Square dives, a realm "inhabited by people 'hungup' with drugs and other habits, searching out new degrees of craziness." Hobbes ventures into this world "suspiciously, even fearfully, but unable to quell his immediate fascination."

How different from the characters in *On the Road*, "mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time. . . ." Yet Hobbes's very detachment is responsible for his insights. "The sense of freedom in his life, the idea of being able to control it, direct it, even waste it, of being able to entertain fancies that were detrimental or exercise a volition that was dangerous" comes to seem "a shameless illusion." Like Holmes himself, a New England Yankee from a venerable family, Hobbes is unnerved by a world where "his values are a nuisance and his anxieties an affront." He is more interested in self-preservation than in the *dérèglement de tous les sens* prescribed by Rimbaud and taken up with such ardor by the Beats. And if this reserve gives "a tinge of square moralism" to the novel, as one breathless chronicler of the period has observed, it also gives it a certain verisimilitude.

*Go* is the dispassionate record of one generation's self-destructive rituals. Disorderly parties in squalid apartments, "hordes of chattering people" leaping into cabs and racing up and down Manhattan, the incessant quest for "weed" or "tea"—as marijuana was then called: what Holmes has captured is that state of mind evoked by Norman Mailer in a glossary he once compiled of "The Hip and the Square," a list that included "wild,""Negro,""midnight,""orgy," and "a catlike walk from the hip." But what is so surprising about Holmes's portrait, apart from its archaisms, is its familiarity:

> Now the rooms were thronged with people [he writes of a party at Stofsky's], many of them unsure just what they were doing there, but intrigued by all the talk, the smoke and laughter, and the ceaseless movement by which people at a party disguise their self-consciousness. The brighter crop of philosophy and literature students from Columbia squatted on the floor, vying for repute in that elaborate game of intellectual snobbery which passes for conversation among the young and intense. They grouped themselves (at a safe distance so as not to appear too interested) around the one or two authentic literary figures that Stofsky had managed to ensnare: a poet of cautious output, a novelist whose work had been appraised as being 'not without talent,' and a soft-faced critic who spoke in terms of 'criteria and intention,' and whose articles were fashionably unreadable. Through the rooms, like pale butterflies, flitted a number of young women, girl friends of the students, exchanging the gossip of the sets they traveled in with offhand arrogance, all the time snatching looks over their shoulders so as not to miss anything and quickly moving on.

This could be a scene from Edmund Wilson's *Memoirs of Hecate County*, the portrait of an earlier generation's rituals of decadence, or Delmore Schwartz describing a party spoiled by "the distortions of self-consciousness" in his story "New York's Eve." There is the same inauthenticity, the same thin accomplishments made much of, the same haze of alcoholic gossip. And, like these other writers' observant personae, Hobbes is made to seem the only sentient character. Toward the end of one chaotic party, he drifts off to a corner by himself,

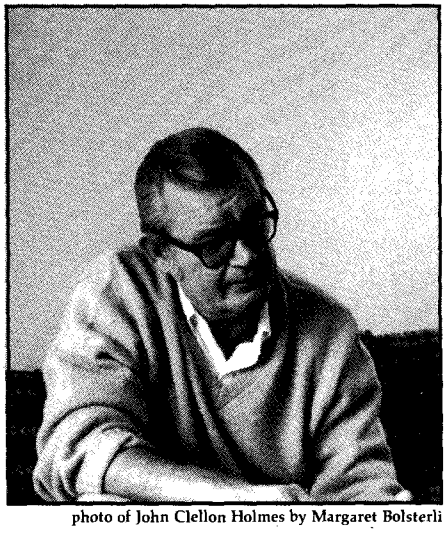

photo of John Clellon Holmes by Margaret Bolsterli

> dizzy from the drinking and the marijuana, and snagged in the senseless return of an old inferiority, cherishing a fond sadness as though he had perceived in all the chaos a deep vein of desperation which everyone else refused to notice. 'Out of what rage and loneliness do we come together?' he thought drunkenly, certain some obscure wisdom lurked in the question.

What provoked this grim agitation, "this bleak eagerness for everything to happen at once"? In Holmes's later view, it was the prospect of nuclear war in that doom-haunted decade, combined with the restiveness that every postwar generation suffers and a rebellion against "conformist" values in favor of the "existential" (how dated those words have become!). Any mad adventure, he recalled in *Nothing More to Declare*, was justified by a conviction that "something had gotten dreadfully, dangerously out of hand in our world." If a rational civilization could produce world war, the death camps, weapons of universal destruction, why not cultivate the irrational? Ginsberg—and Holmes's Stofsky—found support for this idea in Blake, but he could have found it in Keats: "Oh for a life of sensation rather than thought!"

The consequences of such a life are painfully evident in Hobbes's marriage, which finally succumbs to the sexual liberation of the day (another instance of a phenomenon claimed by every generation as its own). When Hobbes's sensitive, unhappy young wife goes off with Pasternak, it is with great reluctance, compelled more by some inarticulate compulsion to be of her time than by any real desire. Hobbes, in turn, must affect to be free of jealousy—another impulse that, like fidelity, is considered archaic—and proceed with a joyless seduction of his own. To be unfaithful is a duty; freedom from the social contract involves just as many obligations as obedience to it.

The other notable character in *Go* is the city itself, the backdrop against which all these lurid scenes are set. In their feverish voyages to the end of the night, Hobbes and his friends speed up the West Side Highway, while "the river-girdled length of the island slipped by them and the George Washington Bridge up ahead hung across the dark throat of the river like some sparkling, distant necklace." And on the novel's last page, Hobbes and his wife Kathryn, returning from a night of aimless carousing in Hoboken, stand on the deck of a ferry boat and gaze out across the water toward New York,

> a fabulous tiara of lights toward which they were moving. For a moment he stood there in the keen gusts that came up in the middle of the river, and searched the uptown towers of that immense, sparkling pile for the Chrysler Building, so that he might look just north of it and imagine that he saw lights in their apartment.
>
> 'Where is our home?' he said to himself gravely, for he could not see it yet.

Hobbes's desperation has a more spe-



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cific cause than his friends'; his frustrated struggle to write is what really drives him out into the streets. Holmes, writing *Go* in his early 20s, had a lively sense of young writers' anguish. His portrait of the vulnerable, manic Stofsky, producing "an endless flow of half humorous, half mystical ideas, mortared with bits of poetry and insights derived from religious paintings," conforms to what we know of Ginsberg's very uneven spiritual life during the early 1950s, when he was a perplexed, awkward boy uncertain of his talent; and he has managed to capture Kerouac when he was a bellicose young novelist whose destiny had yet to be decided, before he became a legend.

Three years after the publication of *Go*, Holmes abandoned New York for Old Saybrook, Connecticut, where he lives for half of each year (the other half he is professor of English at the University of Arkansas); Kerouac wandered out west; and the world depicted in the novel gave way to the legend of the Beats. But there is more of its essence in *Go* than in many subsequent records, for that novel was written before private experience became public myth.

# The One Necessary Individual

## Does God Exist? An Answer for Today
## by Hans Küng
## translated by Edward Quinn

(Doubleday; $17.50)

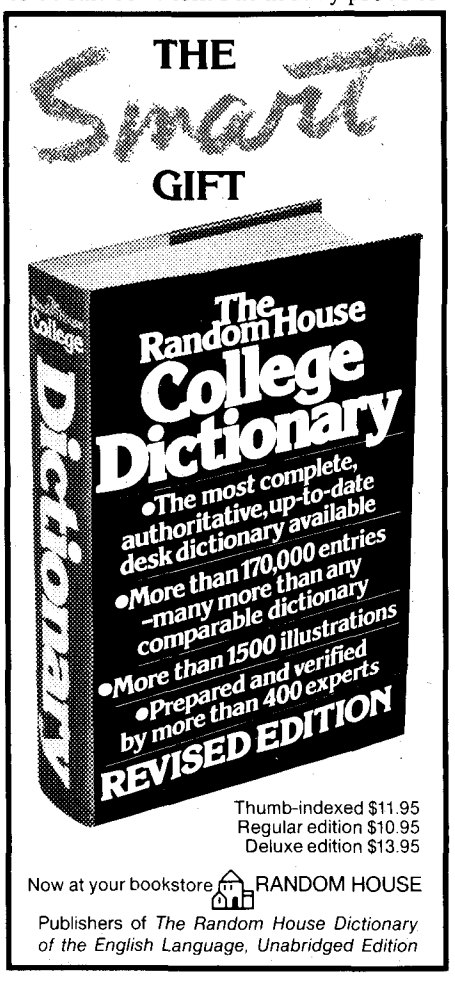
A 1975 Gallup poll reported that 94 percent of the American people believe in God. But Gallup did not bother to ask his respondents who God is for them or the reasons for their remarkable belief. Hans Küng, in his most recent book, does tell his readers who God is for him and why he believes in that God. He presents his position in a manner sure to be unsettling to theists and atheists alike. Indeed, the primary audience of this book should be neither untroubled theists nor atheists. The audience really should be those theists whose belief includes both doubt and risk and those non-theists whose disbelief heads more toward an agnosticism than an atheism. The fact is that neither theism nor atheism is a strictly demonstrable position. Both are convictions grounded in certain beliefs about the nature of reality. Neither contemporary theists nor atheists any longer live in a realm of strict certainty.

Some of the reasons for the loss of certainty on both sides of the classic dispute are not difficult to find. Believers in God are far more aware than their ancestors of the historical carnage caused even in our day by fanatical believers in a "righteous" God. Contemporary believers are conscious that a belief in God can be a return to infantile wish-fulfillment, can serve as an "opium of the people," can be an easy and fatal escape from commitment to this world and its demands. Contemporary theists are also aware, with shame, of the historical role of the churches against science, against the Enlightenment, against the discoveries of Galileo, Darwin, Marx, Freud; and they are embarrassed by the last-ditch efforts among some contemporary theists to find a "gap" somewhere in scientific theory where a tamed God can still "fit" in.

Atheism, too, has lost much of its earlier self-confidence. Some atheistic ideologies (paradigmatically Stalinism and nazism) have loosed their own carnage on history, a carnage that should be the envy of the most fanatical true believer in a vengeful God. The atheistic intellectual self-confidence embedded in a mechanistic, self-regulating model of the universe provided by 19th-century science has yielded to the more tentative atheism, agnosticism, and even revisionary theism of a post-Einstein, post-quantum physics view of the universe.

There are places, to be sure, where a declaration of atheism still takes genuine courage. But those places are, by definition, backwaters of Western secular culture. For the intellectual self-confidence of an earlier scientific atheism has been badly shaken by science itself. The moral attraction, even glamour, of atheism seems largely spent. With the possible exception of presidential candidates, it demands little gumption to declare oneself an atheist in contemporary American society. The cultural slide from Robert Ingersoll's courageous role as the "great infidel" in Victorian America to the mere talk-show eccentricity of Madalyn Murray O'Hair is startling. And that same kind of slide is surely paralleled among believers; consider the decline from Reinhold Niebuhr's complex, intense struggles with both God and the ambiguities of American power to Billy Graham's relaxed chats with his pleasant God and his awed silence in the presence of some unpleasant presidents.

What is unusual about Hans Küng as a theologian is that he knows that this new intellectual situation exists for theists, atheists, and agnostics alike. Many theologians seem to serve principally as house theologians for the institutional churches. They will occasionally step outside what Adorno called these "reservations of the spirit" to make their case for God to the unbelievers. Their cases (the classic "proofs") have much to be said for them but usually prove to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be of limited interest now. For Küng, the present intellectual situation is quite different from any envisaged by the thinkers of the earlier proofs. He knows that the first question today cannot be whether God exists but the prior question of whether one can have any fundamental trust in ultimate reality at all. He knows that a belief in God becomes a justified belief today only as a rational expression of one's prior fundamental trust in reality itself.

More exactly, Küng knows (as his long and central discussions of Pascal and especially Nietzsche testify) that the first question for reflective persons is not whether "God" is the proper name for the ultimate reality, but whether we can trust any reality at all. The real possibility of a fundamental mistrust in ultimate reality—the possibility foreseen with horror by Pascal, the possibility preached with dazzling virtuosity by Nietzsche, the possibility domesticated into the honest "quiet desperation" of many today—is the first question for all reflective persons: atheists, theists, agnostics, pantheists. The best sections of this long work are those where Küng honestly faces this nihilistic alternative. Indeed, only after a lengthy exposure of nihilism as a live option does Küng attempt his own careful and constructive response: his own "yes" to reality.

The heart of Küng's argument for fundamental trust is both psychological and philosophical. Psychologically, he appeals to the justified human need for trust as developed in the self-identity psychology of Erik Erikson and others. Philosophically, he appeals to his own notion of a "critical rationality"—in effect, an argument that all rationalism (whether theist or atheist) has become inappropriate to the actual limits of all thought, including philosophical and theological thought. He argues that to believe in fundamental trust is in fact a more reasonable option than its contradiction. He admits that fundamental mistrust (and its intellectual expression, nihilism) is a powerful and sometimes pervasive reality for any sensitive and intelligent human being. Although it is impossible to reproduce Küng's elaborate historical and systematic argument here, one factor is crucial to note. He does not claim that his arguments for fundamental trust or his further arguments for the reality of God as the ground of that fundamental trust are "proofs" in the strict sense. Rather his arguments are meant to serve as justifiable, reasonable, but inevitably risk-ridden responses for contemporary persons committed to a genuinely critical rationality but suspicious of all rationalisms. Küng will further argue that a yes to reality and, following from that, a yes to God are more reasonable, more critically responsible beliefs than the alternatives of nihilism and atheism.

Küng suggests that these claims can be made even in a genuinely post-Freudian, post-Marxist, post-Nietzschean culture—hence his long analyses of the positions of the great "masters of suspicion" on religion in modernity: Feuerbach, Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. In none of these interpretations does Küng really break new ground. But he offers familiar, solid interpretations of the major reasons for the atheism of each of these thinkers. The elaborate footnotes reveal the main interpretative sources of his readings of major thinkers.

The one main scholarly lacuna here is the lack of attention given to the new Nietzsche (i.e., the post-existentialist Nietzsche) of Derrida, Barthes, et al. Küng does, however, pay careful attention to the Frankfurt School's creative rethinking of both Marx and Freud as well as their brilliant revisionary reflections on how religion and belief in God can function as revolutionary forces in society. (It might be added that these beliefs currently do function in a politically revolutionary way in much of Latin America.)

The one major substantive lacuna is that Küng's focus on the classic modern debates on fundamental trust or mis-

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In an adventure story, they return.
Roughed up a bit maybe—those purple
eyes below his eyes, with the sick-yellow centers;
her torn chemise—but there's a last page and
its aesthetic, and they return.

Go read it to Grandpa. Every breath is
small and distinct now, and on its way up
meets a leaf on its way down. Now
you know what dying is: it
adds the flutter
to gravity's straight-ruled pull.
It's a process. Remember

we used to visit, *a little glass*
*of something*, and all those piles of mysteries
from the Library? Now
you know: those fluttering pages. Gets dark
earlier, come fall. And by the time he couldn't
see any longer, the books were a heavy
scatter on the floor. Outside, the
last of the leaves were overdue.

In the novels they always want gold.
They want to take it with. A book's to a
life as paper to a forest's season, right?
The end of a process.

In an adventure story once, across
this tree-luxuriant place, a hunted
man and woman let go
their essentials—ingots, food, the flares—
for lighter flight, to save what precedes
the essential: the life that needs.

Well now it's the trees. They've let go
everything gold, they're farther each minute.

**Albert Goldbarth**



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trust in ultimate reality implies but does not explicitly address a discussion of the widespread loss of trust in history itself. Surely the ghastly events of our century (the Holocaust, the Gulag, Hiroshima, etc.) have provoked among many a profound mistrust of historical reality. It is that experience which often informs any further reflections on trust or mistrust in ultimate reality. Küng may well address this issue when he develops a doctrine of providence in his future work. In the meantime, the question remains as a real question for us all: can we trust ultimate reality if we cannot trust historical reality?

The emphasis on the empirical reality of fundamental trust leads to the second major concern of the whole book: the modern revisionary notion of God. This aspect of Küng's work is most likely to prove troubling to traditional theists. Despite some ambiguities, Küng seems to hold to a position that in North America is called a "process" understanding of the reality of God. Although Küng's philosophical appeal is far more to Hegel than to Whitehead, this much seems clear: for Küng both a modern understanding of God and the central biblical metaphor that "God *is* love" demand a radical rethinking of many traditional Jewish and Christian concepts of God. For him and for those thinkers of the American "process" view, the familiar concept of God as "changeless" is an import into Jewish and Christian theology from Greek, not biblical, sources. The concept of God's changelessness assumes, with our classical Greek and medieval ancestors, but against both biblical and modern sensibilities, that change must be an imperfection. As a sign of imperfection, change cannot logically be applied to our concepts of God. For, on strictly logical grounds, the concept of God (whether it refers to an existing or nonexisting reality) must be a concept of the "perfect one." What is imperfect by definition cannot be applied to the concept of God.

Yet what if the modern sensibility on change in life is correct over against the ancients and the medievals? Do we not in fact assume that change (intelligent, rational, responsible change) is by no means a mark of imperfection? To be unable to change is literally to be unaffected by new experiences, new insights, new questions, new historical situations. To want to be perfect and therefore changeless is to be caught in a model of the good life as a life of apathy. And apathy may have been a mark of human (and divine) perfection for the ancient stoics but is usually a mark of failure, even pathology, for most modern sensibilities. When did any of us last praise a person by remarking upon his or her remarkable inability to change?

For many Jewish and Christian believers, this cultural shift has yet to influence their understanding of God. This biblical understanding of God, whatever else it is, does portray a God who is actively involved in this world and in history, a God who both profoundly affects and is affected by human actions. Yet traditional theological understandings of this biblical God (Maimonides, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin) were, despite their brilliant moves forward on other fronts, caught in a classical Greek insistence that God, as God, must be changeless. For God to change, for God literally to be affected by human actions, would mean to classical thinkers that God is not perfect. Ultimately, for God to change would mean that God is not God. Yet if God is love, as the central metaphor of the New Testament insists, how can any notion of love include an understanding of God as really unaffected by our actions and hence as literally changeless? As Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his cryptic letters written after his capture by the Nazis stated with memorable clarity: we should now know in this century that "only a suffering God can help."

The virtues of Küng's book deserve serious attention from all. He believes that a contemporary believer in God should provide arguments for that belief before the bar of critical rationality and not through any retreat to the rationalism intrinsic to some of the classic proofs and disproofs of God's reality. Yet he also recognizes that belief in God cannot be proved on rationalist grounds but must always ultimately remain a risk, a trust, a faith. If God exists, God cannot be simply another object in the universe, even the highest object. If God exists, God is none other than the one strictly necessary individual, the person-like ground for our justified fundamental belief in reality itself.

The defects of this work are less obvious than its virtues. Yet they are important to state nonetheless. The most glaring defect, to me, comes in the last section of the book. There Küng repeats his earlier failure (in his complementary work, *On Being a Christian*) to take with sufficient seriousness the


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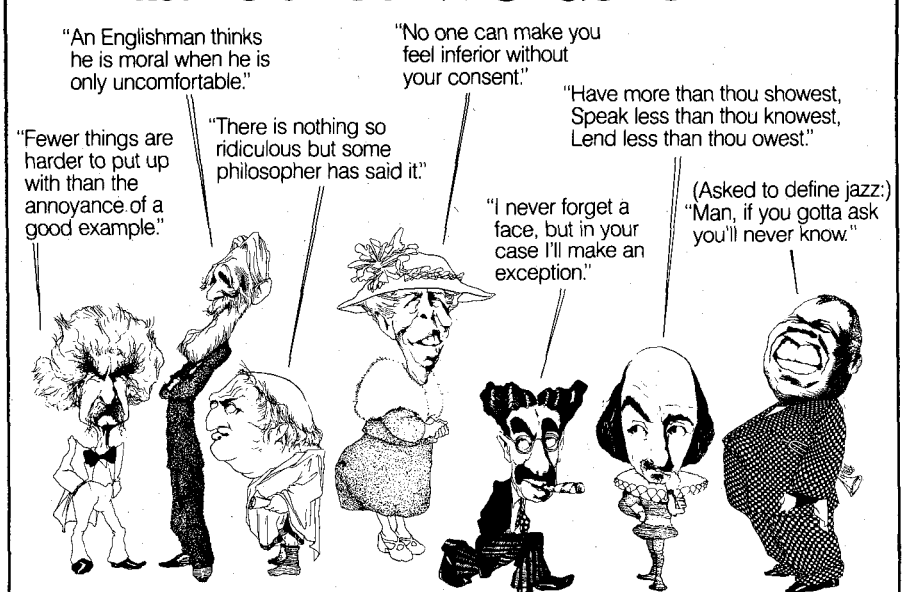
"An Englishman thinks he is moral when he is only uncomfortable."
"Fewer things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example."
"There is nothing so ridiculous but some philosopher has said it."
"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."
"Have more than thou showest, Speak less than thou knowest, Lend less than thou owest."
"I never forget a face, but in your case I'll make an exception."
(Asked to define jazz:) "Man, if you gotta ask you'll never know."

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reality of the Eastern religions. This is especially the case with some forms of Buddhism which are clearly religious and just as clearly non-theistic. The Eastern religious traditions deserve at least the same kind of careful attention that Küng accords the Western secular and theological traditions. Neither here nor in his former work do they really receive it.

From an American theological viewpoint, moreover, Küng's understanding of the reality of God is still caught in the ambiguities of a basically Hegelian position. For example, he frequently uses without qualification such language as God's "determining" the rest of reality. Moreover, although Küng discusses Whitehead and American process thought, he seems to assume that the American process understanding of God is a replica of Hegel. More importantly, he does not really address the major development of Whitehead's position by the American philosopher Charles Hartshorne, who has put forward the most influential and most developed philosophical defense of a process understanding of God. Closer attention to technical process thought also could have clarified Küng's own argument for the reality of God from the vantage point of the experience of fundamental trust.

Küng's greatest strength, however, is not in the finer points of technical theoretical argument. To be sure, he is both careful and adept in argument but he is sometimes somewhat impatient. Küng's mastery as a theologian (and here he clearly towers above many whose technical philosophical expertise is greater) is in his instinctive sense for the heart of the matter and his uncommon common sense. He is both a first-rate theologian and the best exponent of contemporary theological concerns to the wider culture of our day.

One final word: this book was published in Germany in 1978, one year before Küng's dismissal last December from the Catholic faculty at Tübingen. A recognition of these tragic events inevitably occurs for any reader of this English text of 1980. Consider, for example, Küng's typically forthright comments on Teilhard de Chardin:

> The suffering of this theological thinker also remains, then, as shocking evidence of the incompetence of the Roman system and of the persistence to a large extent even at the present time of an anti-modernist mentality, searching out heretics and persecuting dissidents. It cannot be passed over in silence here.

Küng is surely correct. Such actions cannot be passed over in silence: what was done to Teilhard de Chardin, what was more recently done to Hans Küng, is a disgrace unworthy of the great Catholic tradition that nourished them both.

**David Tracy**

*David Tracy* is professor of theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School. He is author of *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Seabury Press) and the forthcoming *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (Crossroads).

# Fiery Giants and Icy Queens

## The Adolescent Diaries of Karen Horney

(Basic Books; $12.95)

As an adolescent, Karen Horney argued with her parents, and condescended to them, worried whether anyone would ever love her, expressed her contempt for the older generation, had crushes on her teachers, overvalued the opinions of her peers, felt a horrified fascination with the idea of sexual activity: just like everyone else. Nevertheless, her diaries are remarkable.

Here she is at 15:

> Tomorrow we go to Frl. Banning. Of course, we are both awfully glad, but we try to persuade ourselves that it is all the same to us or even a bother. On that account I've just been up on the Heideberg alone, for Mother is awfully down again, and picked some flowers for her. Oh, it was so lovely up there, the beautiful landscape spread in a sweep at my feet. I love such a wide view because it brings peace to my heart, which, though only in its *Backfisch* state, still is often quite sad and discouraged. For things are bad at home, and Mother, my all, is so ill and unhappy. Oh, how I would love to help her and cheer her up. If only she had, as I do, some sort of school or other means of distraction.

The banality of the experience and the prose may obscure at first the sensitivity of the response: the observer's capacity to understand her own emotion as a phenomenon of adolescence (the "*Backfisch* state") while indulging it, her ability to imagine that directed activity would alleviate her mother's depression, her willingness to comment on the discrepancy between genuine and enacted feeling as she prepares to visit the teacher on whom she has a crush. Even if Karen Horney were no one in particular, these diaries would offer material of compelling interest: the private reflections of a mind already intensely focused, at the age of 14 (when the diaries begin), on the ways and the reasons people act as they do. Since we read them with the advantage of hindsight, they sound prophetic in their effort to investigate the general truths implicit in the particularities of one girl's experience.

The girl Karen hated her father. Her diaries report her usually unsuccessful struggle to obey the fourth commandment. Sometimes she rages that no one should be expected to honor a man so insensitive and overbearing, sometimes she tells herself that she should respect the authority inherent in the idea of a parent rather than the qualities of the individual. Meanwhile the father, a pious man forever preaching to his children, opposes her continuing her education beyond the age of 15. She should stay home, he says, and save him the expense of a maid. Karen and her mother swear that he will never have to contribute to her support after she leaves the Gymnasium; apparently this argument persuades him. Strangely, when her parents separate, the diarist does not mention the event.

She saw in work—first in study, then in the career it would lead to—the hope of salvation from the inner chaos which terrified her. Work provided an ordering principle, a basis for hierarchy. For a time she felt unsure what career to follow (medicine? teaching?); at one point she triumphantly announces that she has obtained her mother's permission to be an actress. Her sense of the internal forces to be kept at bay, however, hardly varies, although she finds different formulations for what she sees as her problem. "There is such disordered turmoil within me," she writes at 17, "that I myself cannot burrow my



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way through the labyrinth." When she used to pray, she continues, "only the same 4 words passed my lips: 'Lord, give me truth.' Now I know that no one can give that to me, but only through my own work will I get a clear view, or perhaps not get it." She has asked, and been refused, permission to join a class in animal dissection. "*Et voilà* a substitute: I shall take myself to pieces. That will probably be more difficult, but also more interesting."

Although the impulse toward self-dissection—a way of using her intellect to contain turmoil—continued, elaborated, and intensified, conflict attended it. Two years before, on the brink of leaving school for the Gymnasium, she had reported telling herself stories "all the time, now more than ever." These stories, she explains, use what she has read and experienced, have herself and her "crushes" as central characters, and offer variations on a single theme: "what I would like to have." They embody wish-fulfillment fantasies and they multiply in response to stress. She describes such story-telling as one of her chief activities, then immediately deprecates it: "really awfully funny." More sophisticated at 17, she comments, "Only one half of my being lives, the other observes, criticizes, is given to irony." The antithesis between "living" and "observing" suggests her self-critical attitude toward her attempts to master experience by understanding it (or by narrating it, a form of understanding).

"Living," of course, implies sexuality. I say, of course, and Horney appears to think, of course. At other times, however, she expresses great anxiety over what she calls the "sensuality" of her nature. Shortly after writing the passage about self-dissection, she spends an evening with a friend who informs her that girls whom they both know go to bed with men. "No, Alice, it isn't possible," Karen responds. Alice, undaunted, reports that she herself has actually considered "doing it," and she goes on to instruct Karen in the nature of prostitution. Karen feels "very exhausted. The whole dreadful knowledge at once. It was too much." She longs for a chance to let "the storm within" subside. The storm, however, was only beginning. Soon her fantasies turn sexual: "In my own imagination there is no spot on me that has not been kissed by a burning mouth." She decides that "it is never immoral to give oneself to a man one really loves, if one is prepared to also bear all the consequences." She values sensuality—but it is "a *spiritualized great sensuality*" that marks the great soul, in her view. And as the expression of her own sensuality becomes an increasingly real possibility, it seems not so easy to spiritualize it. By the time she is 19, she has shifted ground. "To be free of sensuality means great power in a woman. Only in this way will she be independent of a man. . . . Otherwise eternal battling. And every victory of the senses a Pyrrhic victory, bought with loathing, ever deadly loathing afterwards." The battle is internal. The young woman confesses her longing vision of strong men and harmonious women, women "who know nothing of that war to the death in us between fiery giants and icy queens, between sensuality and intellect."

The dichotomy of living and observing has become heightened into this "war to the death"—the war which Horney's writing richly documents. The first four diaries here printed cover the years from 1899 to 1907, the year Karen turned 22. Then comes a series of revealing premarital letters to Oskar Horney, and finally a diary for 1910-11, after her marriage, recording the partial course of her analysis with Karl Abraham. All the diaries, as well as the letters, reveal the same conflict—sometimes open war, sometimes half-acknowledged struggle.

From the time she decided that a woman who loved should give herself to a man without caring for convention, Karen Horney wanted love affairs. The diary's meticulous accounts of her relationships with men, however, suggest different underlying wishes. Often tortured, often tortuous, her "friendships" with men, like her "loves," never work out satisfactorily. She declares herself in love with a man whom she has only known a few days, then is desolated when he goes away and fails to write. She loves Ernst, but he shilly-shallies, can't decide if he really loves her. She falls in love with Rolf, toward whom, she says, she feels powerful physical attraction. But when he tries to make love to her, "his amorous attentions were simply repugnant to me." On another occasion, "his passionate attentions again were repulsive to me. I found it crude of him to kiss me when he had a sore throat." Then she feels overcome with passion and goes to his room, where they sat on the couch and


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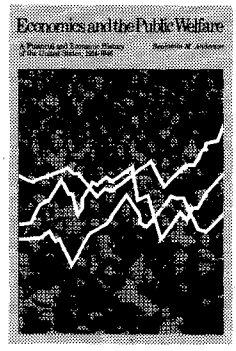


Economics and the Public Welfare
*Financial and Economic History of the United States, 1914-1946*

By Benjamin M. Anderson

"In the direct handling of economic life, governments are usually clumsy and ineffective. In economic life their main business should be that of a traffic cop, not that of a driver, and above all not that of a back-seat driver," says the author of this insightful history. The wisdom of his viewpoint is confirmed by Dr. Anderson's careful account of American financial and economic events beginning before World War I and ending with the Bretton Woods Conference after World War II.

Benjamin M. Anderson taught economics at Columbia, Harvard, and the University of California. He was an economist for the Chase Manhattan Bank and for many years edited the *Chase Economic Bulletin*. Hardcover $10.00, Paperback $4.50

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"chattered and kissed"—but very soon she must leave because her parents expect her.

At some point, the diary suggests, she manages to have sexual relations, but for all the extreme detail of such narratives as the story of Rolf, she fails to specify when or with whom. Meanwhile, she has met Oskar Horney, "the little Hornvieh," and begun a correspondence and what she calls a "friendship" with him. She emphasizes this fact at the end of her account of 1906, then concludes the narrative—which has dealt, for many pages, entirely with her male friends and lovers—in a rather unexpected fashion. "But, if I were to read this some day in later years, I would get no correct impression of the year 1906 if at least one more point were not mentioned: I am getting fonder and fonder of my studies and my working power is born[e] on the wings of joyousness in work."

The image of intellect as an icy queen in conflict with the fiery giant of sensuality by no means applies to Karen Horney: probably it never did. The language of passion attaches itself readily to her feelings about her work. (A few months later she would write to Horney, "I think I would die if I should now stop studying medicine.") Her intellectual activity, in other words, provided not so much a principle of containment as an alternate focus for passion: fiery intellectual desire "battling" its fiery physical counterpart. She sees it as relatively safe, a permissible intensity. Her relationship with Oskar, as far as one can understand it from the letters, emphasizes the intellectual far more than the physical, and thus seems to promise security.

At the beginning of 1906, Horney toys with suicide in case she fails an exam. She moves from the subject of death to her longing for a leader, a strong man who will guide her.

> I am clever enough to learn a great deal in life, but not to find my way out of the confusion of knowledge. Where is the person who is to lead me? Does no one hear how I cry out for him? . . . Rolf understood it. He told me the last time in Berlin: 'You need someone to lead you now. Let me be the one!'—But Rolf was not strong enough to hold me. Was he perhaps—? No, The one who is to come is not Rolf.

Presumably she thought Oskar the person capable of leading her. Her letters often sound deferential, unsure; she tells him how much she has learned from his reflections on ego or offers him book reports on her reading. He appears to have firm convictions about moral matters (we do not have his side of the correspondence); she defers to him. Her letters hold less immediate interest than the diaries specifically because in them one can feel her adapting herself to another mind, writing with an eye to her reader. On the other hand, the hope and pathos of that effort at adaptation make the correspondence absorbing as part of the drama unfolding in this volume. "How do you manage to make me feel ashamed of playing tricks on you? I believe, because you are yourself so true and because you can understand and because you are good." It won't work, one wants to shout, you're making it up. Rarely have the dynamics of psychological projection been so clearly exposed.

Of course she goes ahead and marries Oskar, in 1910. The couple apparently have difficulty achieving sexual compatibility, but Karen declares herself sexually content in the final diary, dominated by her reflections of her work with Abraham, at the time the only practicing psychoanalyst in Berlin. The diary also reports her persistent prostitution fantasies, her doubts (during her first pregnancy) about her capacity for motherhood (she has a "masculine complex," she decides, and uses work to compensate for her feelings of inferiority as a woman), her recurrent longings to return to her unattached student days, and an episode in which Oskar tells her she has degraded herself by flirting so conspicuously with a man she has known in the past. Like the adolescent turmoil, these feelings sound universal (though no less painful for that): the extraordinary thing about this as about the other diaries is the absolute honesty with which they are exposed and examined. But the diary also reports something more ominous: frequent incapacitating fits of fatigue which make work impossible and which the writer now identifies as her "illness."

As far back as 1901, not yet 16, she had recorded a similar difficulty ("In the condition I am in now, I am absolutely

"ALEKSANDR KRUGLOV, the Soviet soldier who burst into the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan and sought asylum, 'voluntarily' decided to return to the USSR after meeting with the Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan, who reportedly promised no retaliation. We'll never know whether the Soviets will keep their promise, but if it's any consolation, before Kruglov left the Kabul Embassy he was given the private number of the U. S. Embassy in Moscow."

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good for nothing.") and, characteristically, tried to comprehend its causes. A note of panic creeps into her tone every time she recounts such an episode. All she wants, she says, is to work, and she can't. Even after the analysis, she cannot count on continuing capacity. The book ends with a letter to Dr. Abraham, presumably never sent, asking to resume analysis specifically to concentrate on the work difficulty. It is a sad ending for the girl who had longed "to learn how to listen to the delicate vibrations of my soul." The listening had failed to reveal to her that the battle of fiery giants and icy queens could not be resolved by conscious commitment to the life of the mind.

One can only feel privileged at the opportunity to read these documents. Later in her life, Karen Horney wrote passionately (even in scientific papers) about the development of women, but she also revealed an intense desire for privacy: she would not have wanted us to see her diaries. On the other hand, if she could realize their power to clarify familiar conflicts, perhaps she wouldn't mind. The diaries and letters possess narrative force and interest, in their account of a young woman's development, but they also offer something far rarer: the unflinching insight of a mind insistently concerned "to be incorruptibly *true to myself*."

**Patricia Meyer Spacks**

*Patricia Meyer Spacks*, professor of English at Yale University, is completing a book on the social mythology of adolescence.

# The Tenants of Tothill House

## Setting the World on Fire by Angus Wilson

(Viking; $11.95)

Angus Wilson's uncommon energy is demonstrated not only by the number of his books (several works of literary criticism, in addition to his short stories and the novels *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, *Late Call*, and *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot*, among others), but also by the very fiber of his writing. As a novelist he is tireless in his pursuit of each and every character. He pounces upon the slightest telltale gesture or turn of phrase. Elision—the gliding over of smaller occurrences, summation of random conversations, or any other form of creative shorthand—appears to strike him as a kind of cheating. He is meticulous, exhaustive in building up his scenes, word by word and clink of china upon clink of china. The result is people so firmly defined that you feel you could count the stitches in their English lawn dresses—although, in fact, you could not, for it is by their speech and movements that he describes them. Manner is crucial. Color of coat, length of hair tell Angus Wilson less than a single scrap of nervous laughter.

In his latest novel, *Setting the World on Fire*, he directs his scrutiny toward two brothers named Piers and Tom Mossom. Piers is mercurial, dashing, burning with creative ideas. Tom is steady and cautious, more aware of life's dangers, less imaginative perhaps, but capable of greater sympathy for other people.

The contrast in their personalities is mirrored exactly by the architectural contrasts of Tothill House, their great-grandfather's London mansion, in which John Vanbrugh's airy and baroque Great Hall is tacked onto Roger Pratt's classic main structure. Naturally, Piers loves the Great Hall, while Tom admires the main structure. Hence their nicknames: Van and Pratt. In addition, Tothill House gives this book its ironic title. A painting on the Great Hall's ceiling shows Phaethon falling from his chariot, descending into the flames caused by his own hubris. Piers/Van believes that Phaethon looks sublimely happy. Tom/Pratt finds the picture terrifying.

We first meet the brothers in 1948, when they are young children. A leisurely visit to Tothill House places us securely within the family; we're introduced to their widowed mother and their paternal relatives—the ancient great-grandfather, a grandmother so enthralled by Christian Science that she refuses to see the negative in any situation, and a rather silly bachelor uncle.

There's a leap of eight years, then, during which the boys have grown to adolescence. Piers has become passionately interested in play-directing; he dreams of producing Lully's *Phaethon* beneath the painting in Tothill's Great Hall. Tom is an earnest student. The uncle has become engaged to an outrageous Italian woman who puts a considerable strain upon the positive-thinking grandmother. And Rosemary, the boys' mother, is troubled throughout this section by some secret worry which, when she finally reveals it, splinters the family. The brothers are forced to choose between their mother and their relatives at Tothill. They choose their mother and say goodbye to Tothill—and, incidentally, to the financial support Tothill has provided for them.

Another swoop in time; it's 1969. Piers is a well-known director, and heir to Tothill House after all. Tom is an established lawyer. The uncle is dead, the grandmother dying. And in London, it's a period of terrorists and random bombings, which eventually intrude upon the brothers' small, safe world. The end is sudden and shocking. We're left stunned, but also oddly irritated. Nothing beforehand—not even the few literal-minded hints dropped—has prepared us for such an abrupt conclusion. There's something disjointed about it all.

Or something sagging, might be a better way to put it. *Setting the World on Fire*, if diagramed, would resemble one of those evergreen swags draped along a mantel at Christmastime: a taut moment, a long droop, another taut moment, and so on. When Piers goes on and on about his theatrical productions (several of which we witness, in varying degrees of completion), the combined weight of casting problems, costume frills, wig styles, acoustics, and placement of orchestra is enough to sink the whole novel. There are extended conversations so fidgety and detailed that the reader positively itches, and they're not for any ultimate purpose.

The sags are deepened by the fact that, although the brothers make those great leaps in time, they seem the same age throughout. Even as children and adolescents, their inner voices are those of jaded, middle-aged English gentlemen. (Look at the teenaged Piers, distracted by a pretty girl during a conver-



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sation: "As he salivated, he knew fury with himself, that desire should interfere with the absolutely exact attention he must give to every word that was said at this moment.") There's no real sense of movement, only of situations flowing past the brothers like so many wheeled stage-sets, while Piers and Tom remain stationary—the one eternally Vanbrugh-like, the other eternally Pratt-like.

Contributing to the general slowness is a style so complicated you're continually forced to stop and reread. Some of the sentences look like examples in a grade-school punctuation class: "He could only hope at best with amateur singers and no experience to avoid a laughable failure." Some are illogically constructed: "Whatever the lost paradise, the broken dreams, the riches thrown away, the black nightmares of their childhood (never, never to be shared with anyone else) would not return." And occasionally, there's outright bad grammar:

> Looking at the devastation wrought by the Coal Board upon the formal garden in front of them, it seemed to Hubert for a moment that he had done wrong to tell the boy that only Pratt's fine regularity could preserve the world that he would inherit from the shambles to which brigands and bureaucrats were steadily reducing it.

On the other hand, in the book's taut sections we're riveted. There's a wonderfully edgy family luncheon, with a ne'er-do-well maternal uncle playing up to the boys' chilly grandmother, his sister dithering with anxiety, and the great-grandfather acting perversely deaf and senile. There's a shattering scene when the Italian fiancée tells the family some home truths, and another when the mother finally reveals her secret. Revelation, in fact—the demolition of polite deception—is where Angus Wilson does best.

And he does best of all at *internal* revelation: those rare, elusive shifts of vision that involve no outward action whatsoever. Watch the ordinarily unshakable Piers, for instance, when the single click of his heel upon a marble floor makes him realize all at once how much of his life depends upon dreams. Or look at Tom crossing a bridge, matter-of-factly heading toward a train station;

> Then suddenly there was no road nor traffic nor people but water whose depths he could not see. And then, looking up, high, high above him the the sky, across which some clouds were moving. At once the bridge's pavement beneath him was insecure, trembling. The clouds above looming closer, threatening—the skies would fall in. He pulled his back straight and threw off the strange thought. He noted other passersby—an old woman telling her daughter of something 'green and ever so large it was.' A double-chinned man whose head thrust forward showed what 'sunk in thought' meant. But they were nothing—he felt only himself, his own body totally alone, himself, Tom, and high above the sky, nothing, nothing between to save him from its fall, and below, the trembling bridge, the bottomless water. The sense of the aloneness of his body terrified him, and all the passersby were only a dream —none of them were there, no one was there but him, he felt, and nothing, nothing would save him from finding safety in the depths of the river below, nothing could save him from throwing himself down where he would be cradled from all this frightening void above and around him.

At moments like this, we recognize Angus Wilson's particular blend of vitality and control. *Setting the World on Fire* is not, by a long shot, his best work, but still it is a remarkable novel, alternately absorbing and exasperating, always deserving of our serious attention.

**Anne Tyler**

*Anne Tyler*'s most recent novel is *Morgan's Passing* (Knopf).

# From Sacco and Vanzetti to Nixon

## John Dos Passos: Twentieth Century Odyssey by Townsend Ludington

(E. P. Dutton; $20)

It would be inaccurate to say that John Dos Passos is on the verge of being "rediscovered," but a spate of recent books and articles and a forthcoming reference guide at least suggest an increase of interest in this hard-to-pin-down and contradictory man. Townsend Ludington's authorized biography supplements and orchestrates his edition of Dos Passos's letters and diaries published seven years ago. Fair and untendentious and grounded on a generation of scholarship and newly opened collections of literary memorabilia, it provides the fullest and most detailed record to date of Dos Passos's public and private life. Henceforth it should be easier to make a disinterested assessment of Dos Passos's political engagements and to chart the stages of his literary development.

The popular version of his career tells of an illegitimate son of a corporation lawyer who, after attending posh schools, throws off his bourgeois habiliments, attaches himself to radical causes, invents his own brand of corrosive reportage, and composes his finest work. Following his disenchantment with the left in the mid-1930s, he moves to the right and finally winds up as an apologist for McCarthy, Goldwater, and Nixon. His writing deteriorates in the process, and his declining importance generally is attributed, at least in part, to this ideological shift. The trilogy *USA* is his one work likely to last.

Even the critics who fault this simplistic appraisal and acknowledge the importance of his innovations and influence have not tried to make much of a case for Dos Passos's literary output after he renounced his radical allegiances. And it is worth noting that Ludington devotes 407 pages of his biography to the first 44 years of Dos Passos's life and fewer than 100 to the last 29.

In dealing with Dos Passos as turnabout, Ludington is both defensive about his subject's misapprehended motivations and critical of the intolerance—he even calls it "paranoia"—reflected in some of his last publications and letters. Still, he finds no violent disjunction in his life. Pervasive influences during Dos Passos's formative years—parental, social, and intellectual—contribute to the making of the Virginia squire; the contributor to *Reader's Digest* and the *National Review* is already foreshadowed in the Harvard graduate who facetiously called for guillotines to be set up in Wall



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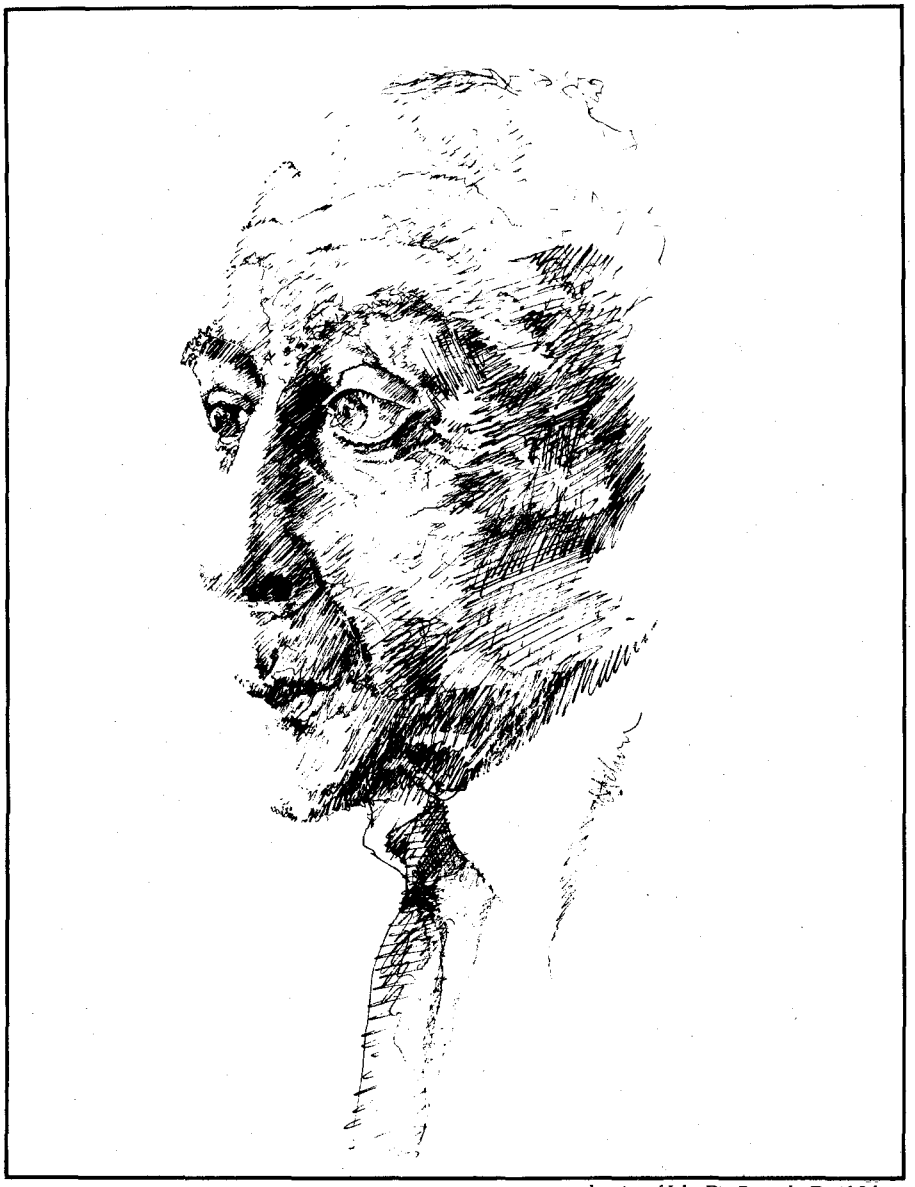

drawing of John Dos Passos by David Schorr

Street. Both the younger and the older man are emotionalists with a penchant for hyperbole.

Ludington is particularly good on the childhood of Dos Passos. Without resort to psychoanalytic probing, he shows the mark of the bar sinister on the personality of a boy denied a proper father until he was 14. Dos Passos senior could live openly with his unacknowledged family only in Europe—and then sporadically. Young Jack, growing up abroad, had to bear all too early the burden of responsibility for his long-suffering and doting mother. In 1910 the death of his father's first wife legitimized the "technically irregular" household, and John Roderigo Madison was free to assume the surname Dos Passos. By then he was a student at the Choate School, a stammering and myopic misfit, poor in sports and foreign-seeming to his classmates. During his Harvard years, in some respects the happiest of his life, he formed lasting friendships, but in spite of the "hell of a fellow" pose he cultivated, he retained a certain fastidiousness and reserve with his intimates and never cottoned to the smutty talk and fornications of his less inhibited companions. In his fiction, the sexual act is usually a rather repulsive mechanical operation.

How did the paradoxically solitary and gregarious Dos Passos rise above his handicaps and not only survive but succeed? He was gifted, of course, ambitious as well, and driven by passionate commitments. He was also protected by the cushion of class. The ambulance driver, reporter, traveler, radical, novelist lived a privileged life for all his hazardous undertakings. During World War I, he had access to the officialdom he execrated, and like other young gentlemen volunteers of the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service he could indulge his taste for adventure while playing the cynical iconoclast:

> My God what a time—all the cant and hypocrisy, all the damnable survivals, all the vestiges of old truths now putrid and false infect the air, choke you worse than German gas—the ministers from their damn smug pulpits, the business men—the heroics about war—my country right or wrong—Oh infinities of them! Oh the tragic farce of the world. Hardy's Arch satirist is more a bungling clown than an astute and sinister humorist.

Thereafter his plunges into the hot spots of the globe—foraging expeditions to gather material for his articles and books—were complemented by walking trips and idyllic vacations with doting friends. They always could be counted on to loan him money in a pinch, and because the income from his writing was seldom adequate to his needs (simple habits, old clothes, cheap cars notwithstanding) he was a constant borrower almost until the last decade of his life.

Such details are not important in themselves, but they somewhat alter the image of the radical outsider, spokesman for underdogs, and satirist of snobs and fatcats. Dos Passos came of age at a time when a number of American middle-class writers were conscientiously flouting the codes of their elders and associating with the children of immigrants. From the mid-1920s to mid-1930s, he was professionally as well as politically involved with this group. But Ludington's book suggests that Dos Passos always felt more at ease with college friends like E. E. Cummings or with the writers and artists invited to


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Sara and Gerald Murphy's elegant picnics than he did with the radical New York intelligentsia. Hemingway thought Dos Passos's attachment to his well-heeled friends, given his revolutionary opinions of capitalism and its culture, was ignoble as well as inconsistent, but then Hemingway was hardly the one to pass on Dos Passos's motivations and loyalties.

Dos Passos broke with the left at the time of the Spanish Civil War, a critical moment, as he and others have testified, when his antipathy toward bureaucratic socialism came to a head and he began to detect its sappers at work in the Spanish republic. Earlier symptoms and sources of his disaffection have been pointed out, notably by the historian John P. Diggins, and by Melvin Landsberg, the first to explore seriously the influence of the older Dos Passos on his son's political thought. Much has been written, too, about Dos Passos's aversion to power and organization. But perhaps another way to regard his change of head and heart is to see it as a by-product of a deeper pessimism often affecting resisters of historical tendency. The disparate literary company he belonged to (it embraced among others Edmund Wilson, Van Wyck Brooks, Archibald MacLeish, and some of the southern Agrarians) hankered for a lost and betrayed America. It was their belief, usually if not always obliquely expressed, that urban ethnic intellectuals simply did not know or appreciate the real American mentality.

When Dos Passos turned away from the European debacle and began his explorations of "the ground we stand on," he was moving in a direction that would bring him close to the Anglo-Saxonist "Triumphant Democracy" position of his father. And whereas he had once welcomed the immigrant outsiders as allies who brought new life and color to stale gentilities, he now saw them as carriers of an alien virus, or at best, "an echo of the liberal mitteleuropa culture that has just bitten the dust with such a fearful crash in Europe." A note of bigotry, Ludington observes, crept into his pronouncements. When he charged that "the self-governing tradition has been diluted by the diverse habits of the stream of newcomers from Europe" and disparaged their "neo-ghetto ignorance," his old friend Gilbert Seldes felt obliged to remind him that not all Americans were Anglo-Saxon and that American habits and culture were multinational and multiracial in origin.

Ludington's subtitle, *Twentieth Century Odyssey*, is most apposite for the biography of a restless traveler whose life literally as well as metaphorically might be likened to a voyage—a voyage filmed in color through the filtered "camera eye" of an opinionated director. The resulting panorama, "personal yet wide ranging," as Ludington puts it, had little of the "vast unconscious scenery" of Whitman, a poet Dos Passos claimed to stem from, and was much less ingratiating. It was not a landscape that invited one's soul. Nor did he render it with the mixture of topographical specificity and emotional engagement to be found, for example, in Thoreau or Hemingway.

It is appropriate to mention Hemingway again in this connection, because he appears throughout the biography as a bullying and envious competitor (though capable of generous acts) whom the more decent Dos Passos alternatively hero-worshipped and appeased—and never really liked. There is something almost inevitable in the final rupture which left both men bitter and unforgiving. Possibly Dos Passos had Hemingway in mind when he wrote in *The Best Years:*

> Men of letters suffer from conceit more than ordinary men. They are an egotistic lot. Friendships between them are precarious. They are like little bulls that way. The bull that was friendly and playful as a calf will gore the guts out of you at the drop of a hat when he's grown.

Yet Hemingway must be judged the purer artist with a finer sense of language, readier to submerge himself in his writing, less susceptible to ideological allurements. Dos Passos, as his letters show, never stopped lecturing and admonishing. He was plagued with ideas, and for all his Defoe-like surface and power of narrative expression, seldom managed, save in his great trilogy, to maintain authorial distance. Both his fiction and non-fiction can be read as the extended *Bildungsroman* of a self-styled chronicler, moralist, and satirist —himself a part of the history he wrote about, or perhaps not so much the participant as the involved and ever more disillusioned observer.

**Daniel Aaron**

*Daniel Aaron* is professor of English at Harvard and author of *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (Avon).

# This Way to the Rat Race

## Getting into College
## by Frank C. Leana

(Hill and Wang; $11.95, $5.95 paper)

## Group Memory: A Guide to College and Student Survival in the 1980s
## by Alston Chase

(Little, Brown/Atlantic Monthly Press; $12.95)

Back in 1969, a friend tells me, he and three other *Yale Daily News* staffers stayed up several nights in a row compiling *The Insider's Guide to the Colleges*, partly from memory and largely from hearsay. *The Insider's Guide*, which commended Amherst College for its drug trade, dubbed Dartmouth's New Hampshire campus, "Hangover," and, needless to say, sang the praises of Yale, nonetheless discovered a market. The first printing of 10,000 copies sold out in a month. By 1971, when I was applying to colleges, a similarly irreverent handbook had emerged that was more to the liking of us westerners. The reader of Susan Berman's *Underground Guide to the College of Your Choice* would have found that "Arizona State is a hot, dry, hedonistic, healthy place to be—for your body," that "Parents send their daughters to Mills to be protected, refined and properly prepared to lead a cultured lawn-partied life," and that "Dartmouth offers fine educational facilities, if that's what you dig." Berman's



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crew of student researchers rated colleges on the availability of draft counselors, hallucinogens, birth control pills at campus infirmaries, even on the likelihood of police brutality. Students, for instance, were thought to be safer at Harvard than at Berkeley because "after all, [at Harvard] a pig might be breaking open the head of a famous wind bag's son and this could bring down a lot of shit."

I mention all this because anyone who had grown accustomed to what my Yale friend calls "the worm's-eye view" in college handbooks would be startled by what's on bookstore shelves these days. Today's college guides are written not by students but by college admissions officers and high school counselors whose overriding message seems to be that college is a mighty tough place: tough to get into and even tougher to get through. Just a glance at *Playing the Private College Admissions Game*, with its chapter called "Sell, Sell, Sell: Why Colleges and Students Must Flaunt Themselves," or *The College Survival Kit: 51 Proven Strategies for Success in Today's Competitive College World*, or *How to Beat Test Anxiety and Score Higher on Your Exams* would, I think, be enough to send the most confident high school seniors running back to homeroom.

It's difficult on the face of it to understand the need for such books. The baby boom generation, after all, has graduated from college leaving more open slots than ever before at most schools. Yet at the same time, college students have grown more concerned than ever before with what their college investment can get them. When choosing colleges, they aren't interested in academic diversity, lifestyle, drugs, or sex half so much as in a school that will look good on a résumé. Blame it on the recession, or on the glut of college grads that currently forces one in four to take jobs that don't require a BA, or simply on an inevitable pendulum swing in values—the fact is that kids are finding it harder to get into the few colleges they want to go to, while the "undesirable" colleges go begging for students with all manner of promotional gimmicks.

The result is that the college-bound student is thrown into a world in which both colleges and students are likely to be doing a good bit of dissimulating. To ensure safe transit through the groves of academe, the new guidebooks tell us, students had better get smart about the application process first off. Take a look


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at the advice offered by high school counselor Frank Leana in *Getting into College*. "Accept no written account or word-of-mouth picture of a college," Leana warns. Always visit the campus and once there check its vital signs: "Are lawns and buildings well-maintained? This is a sign not only of a healthy attitude but of a healthy budget." As for getting in, Leana gives tips on how to dress for interviews, how to present the right image in a personal essay, how to select teachers for recommendations. His advice on soliciting peer recommendations shows just how far students have come in the last 10 years: "Choose a friend whom you trust to do a thoughtful, impressive, yet genuine job. I have heard of several instances where a jealous 'friend,' fearful of his own chances, wrote an uncomplimentary recommendation for his classmate." Almost more horrifying are the small details Leana expects students to attend to: "Send applications by registered mail," "keep the cancelled checks of the required deposit with each application," "when you speak to an admissions secretary or representative on the telephone, ask his or her name and record it with the date and content of your conversations." While I don't doubt the necessity of these procedures, I'm not sure I would want to meet the kind of student who actually follows all this advice. One might just as well skip college and head straight for Wall Street.

If Leana and his colleagues are riding the wave of student preprofessionalism, former Harvard admissions officer Alston Chase depends on a very different view of youth in *Group Memory: A Guide to College and Student Survival in the 1980s*. Chase numbers students, along with alumni, parents, and college administrators, among his target audience for the book, but I suspect they will find little to like here. He takes his title from a notion developed by behaviorists that many animal species possess a "group memory" unique to that species and vital to its survival. A herd of wild sheep, say, has a "group memory of the territory"; if its young are raised in captivity this common memory will be lost and future generations will be unfit for life in the wild. He applies this "fact" about herd animals to undergraduates, adds to it some alarming evidence that colleges today aren't serving their students, and reaches the bizarre conclusion that by dropping general education requirements in the 1960s, colleges have deprived our young of their "group memory," hence of their ability to survive.

Chase's litany of college ills is certainly frightening: 79 percent of all colleges are in financial trouble, and with a 20 percent turnover in college presidents, leadership is shaky; graduate school entrance exam scores have declined 59 points since 1965, even further than college entrance exam scores; cheating, vandalism, and violent crimes on campus are on the upsurge; a nationwide financial aid system seems designed to break up families by encouraging students to declare financial independence. But Chase's conclusions are based not so much on statistics as on what I'd call the new academic conservatism. His ravings about "group memory" and "the emasculation of the liberal arts"—and the rationalizations of the "core curriculum" proponents at Harvard and elsewhere—all boil down to just one unstated belief: college students don't know what's good for them. Chase comes as close as any to saying it: take away parietal rules and "behavior sinks to the lowest common denominator"; drop general education requirements and students will "take the courses they want rather than the courses they need."

Are these the same students that, by Frank Leana's standards, have registered their letters, logged in phone calls, and toted calculators across countless campuses just to get into college? There is, decidedly, a split mood on many campuses. With nearly 60 percent of students majoring in pre-professional fields, careerism is strong. And since those who don't know what careers they want are likely to feel like misfits, just drifting is nearly as popular, with 20 percent of students transferring every year and 50 percent interrupting their studies for indefinite periods of time. Yet forcing basic courses on students who are already extremely disciplined or just plain passive can only compound their problems.

But the conservative "reformers" share another conviction that makes their success all the more certain. Most, like Chase, spent much of the past two decades in college administration and, like Chase, "have not forgotten those dark days in the sixties when we were pariahs for keeping the faith, when we were denounced at faculty meetings for thinking about the past and worrying about the future." Once outlawed in their own territory, these academic bureaucrats are retaliating with a regimen of introductory courses in languages, sciences, and humanities that sounds suspiciously like the ones the "reformers" were raised on. Sadly, this backlash comes in an era when students have too little sense of themselves *as students* to fight back.

In the late 1960s college campuses exploded when students found themselves caught in a double bind: the brutal realities of war and the draft forced a maturity that was denied in campus regulations and "irrelevant" coursework. How long will it take this new generation of students to recognize its own double bind: an economy that demands preprofessionalism and an academy that insists on the three Rs?

**Megan Marshall**

*Megan Marshall* is a Boston writer.

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**Correspondence,** *from page 5*

language novels," (not a very useful grouping), or by omitting Goytisolo, "Spanish American novels." But then Gass has the Spaniard twisted up with the other writers "to the south." *TNR* makes no pretense of expertise in Latin American matters, but readers deserve at least accuracy and maybe even insight. Both are absent in Gass's work.

*Richard W. Slatta*
*Department of Latin American History*
*North Carolina State University*
*Raleigh, North Carolina*

*The editors reply:*
William Gass is not responsible for the box title; we are.

**Correction**

Due to a typographical error, the meaning was distorted in a sentence of Gerald Graff's review of *Criticism in the Wilderness: the Study of Literature Today*, by Geoffrey H. Hartman (*TNR*, November 1, page 36). The sentence should have read: "But Hartman does have his eye on many of the central problems of his discipline, and it is no doubt significant that a scholar of his stature should now speak out about them."



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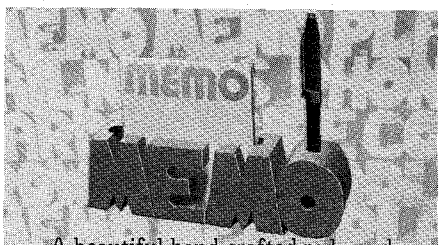


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**"Civilized," if you** would believe it, was the authoritative verdict James Reston pronounced on the presidential campaign debate. It's not exactly the word I would have used. But then Reston may understand by civilization something different than I do. Surely, though, even he—so anxious to sue—cannot really believe that the strategy encounter between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan reflected an advanced state of social culture or progress in statecraft or urbanity and sophistication or habits of rational and honest discourse. So Reston must have meant by "civilized" mere politeness, a judgment which is apt only if one expected the debate to be a street brawl. It might have been one, what with Carter's alley fighter instincts. But he was mean enough, which is to say derisive and jeering, as it was. An interesting scrap requires at least two eager contenders, and there was just one. Reagan seemed fight-shy, averse to roughing up his opponent. Some say that's because Ronnie is too decent to enjoy combat, and others say just too tired. A third possibility is that he was being nice because his pollsters told him to be. I believe he is just too thick to have seen how many times during the debate he might actually have devastated Carter. What we had before us were two mortifyingly shallow men: one so simple that he can hardly grasp any ideas beyond those encapsulated in the clichés of free enterprise and less government which are his signature; the other so routinely duplicitous that he can recognize no value other than his own success. Civilized leadership this is not.

**UNESCO was established** to enhance internationally the educational, scientific, and cultural aspects of civilization. But as with almost every other agency associated with the UN, its intrinsic purposes were long ago subordinated to the ideological ends of the communist bloc and various third world *enragés*. The latest episode involves a UNESCO resolution authorizing greater government regulation of the media—by, among other methods, licensing journalists and imposing official standards for "responsible" reporting. The Soviets backed the proposal because it legitimizes their information policies. Moscow will now have UNESCO as a shield against the "basket three" human rights provisions of the Helsinki agreement. The British representative to the five-week, 2,000-delegate UNESCO talkfest in Belgrade wanted the West to make a stout defense of the first freedom, but the French predictably had already broken ranks before the lines were even drawn. The US delegation—headed by Robin Chandler Duke, one of that breed of high-minded socialites traditionally charged with the cultural portfolio—put on something of a rhetorical show of opposition. They actually succeeded in eliminating some of the most offensive language. Then we started equivocating, temporizing, trimming. "Oh yes, we made our presence very much felt," I was told on the phone by Sarah Goddard Power, deputy assistant secretary of state for human rights, an earnest clubwoman/anxious bureaucrat type who oversees US-UNESCO relations. "It's better to try to influence from inside the organization," Mrs. Power volunteered, anticipating my next question. Some other blather about misunderstandings, technical development, clearinghouses, etc., before she said "*ciao*" and signed off. UNESCO would be paralyzed without our participation, to say nothing of our money. That money, according to the resolution passed in Belgrade, will now finance propaganda efforts of the PLO. Freedom of the press is a fundamental principle of democratic society and of civilization itself. Why should we cooperate in enterprises mobilized against such principles? "To reduce the damage," say the functionaries and their press pulpit supporters. "A first-class American delegation managed to take the sting out of . . . the Third World's chosen communications vehicle of the last few years," an editorial in the *Washington Post* consoles us. Our enemies are only too willing to remove the sting. Without the sting, we won't know the hurt that is being done.

**In the history of thought** and of religion, the rise of monotheism may represent the most formative advance of civilization. My friend Bernard-Henri Lévy, the leading figure among the French "new philosophers," has just published in America *The Testament of God* (Harper & Row), a stunning evocation of monotheism as the incorruptible antagonist to the idolatry of the state and of totalitarian ideologies. When I reviewed his earlier book, *Barbarism with a Human Face*, in these pages two years ago, I wrote that it had "changed the mind of a generation." That certainly was true in Western Europe, and particularly in France, where the book and the school it spoke for disrupted the dominant scholastic orthodoxies which for years had casually and callously affirmed monstrous tyranny. In this country, however, the book was a dud, both commercially and critically, and so changed no one's mind. Now comes Lévy once more, again after agitating the French intelligentsia, bringing his book to near certain neglect and disdain by that class of easily infuriated American academics and *feuilletonists* of the left who resent the aggressive truthfulness of his politics and so won't trouble to ponder his philosophy. It's a shame.

**Civilized societies develop** ordered processes of reform. We've been reforming our political system so much these last few years that there is hardly anything recognizably political—or at least vigorously and spontaneously political—left in it. One of the more ridiculous manifestations of the reform ethos this year was the application of the television equal time doctrine to the Republican opponent of Representative Michael (Ozzie) Myers of Pennsylvania. Two local Philadelphia stations had shown FBI video tapes of Myers receiving his $50,000 Abscam bribe. Myers's opponent demanded and got the same amount of free exposure by way of compensation. A far more serious subversion of democracy in the name of reform was the legal impediment to an effective Anderson campaign. The two major candidates each got $29 million from the federal till to conduct their campaign, and their parties were allowed to solicit as much as $20,000 from any one contributor beyond that huge sum. But Anderson, as an independent candidate, was limited to contributions no higher than $1,000 a contributor, and got nothing from the Treasury. Now the same fairness principle that gave Ozzie Myers's opponent free television time did not apply to Anderson after the Carter-Reagan debate. But it should have, if for no other reason but that Jimmy and Ronnie were seen cheating on the tube just as poor, tacky Ozzie was. One thing is certain: the next four years won't see a genuinely civilized presidency, though James Reston may.

**M.P.**



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# MORTGAGE MONEY: WHO NEEDS IT? WHERE WILL IT COME FROM?

You can't always choose the best time to buy a new house. The new job won't move closer. The children won't stop growing. So you may find yourself looking for mortgage money in times like these, when mortgages are hard to find and even harder to afford.

Mortgage money becomes more scarce and costly for many reasons, but generally it is because savings institutions are not able to attract sufficient deposits and have to pay more for the funds they do attract. That's why fewer loans are being made and the requirements are more stringent. You're ready to move, but you're caught in a credit crunch.

## CUSHIONING THE CREDIT CRUNCH

This has happened off and on for the last 15 years. Yet millions of families found their mortgage money. More than a trillion dollars worth of new mortgage loans have been made since 1965. One reason is that there is a huge secondary market for mortgages, a complex system of private businesses and government agencies which buys mortgages from the original lenders, thereby replenishing their supply of money. One part of that market is the Federal National Mortgage Association, or Fannie Mae, a shareholder-owned corporation working in the private sector.

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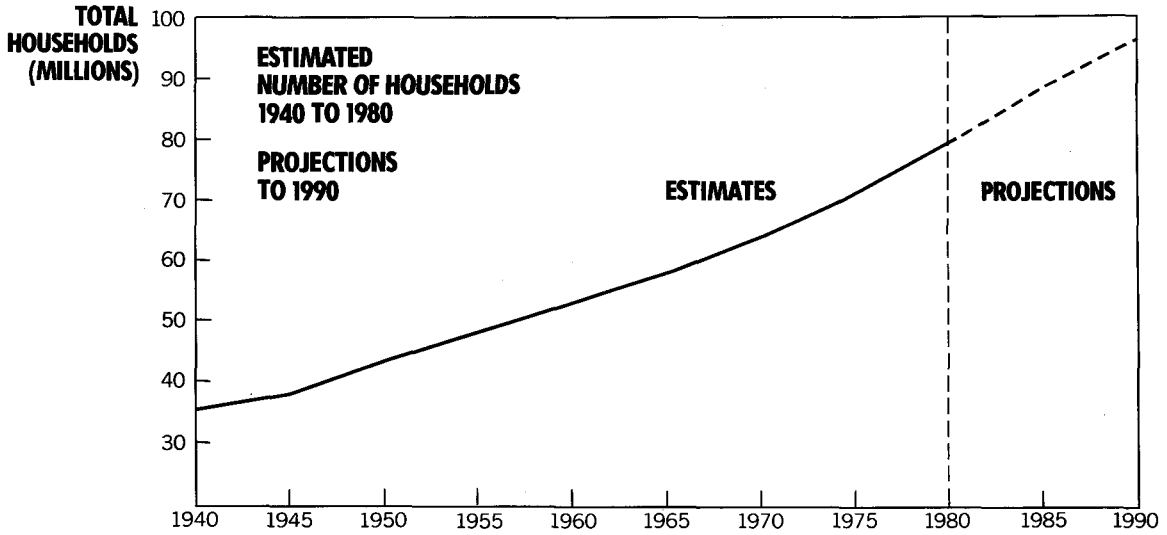
## THE WINDOW THAT NEVER CLOSES

When funds from other sources dry up or are limited, Fannie Mae is still buying. Unlike banks and savings and loans, which usually must depend on funds from local depositors, Fannie Mae can tap capital markets worldwide. The money we borrow is then "recycled," used to purchase mortgages, replenishing the supply available for new loans.

Since becoming a private corporation in 1968, Fannie Mae has purchased mortgages worth $65 billion representing financing for close to 3 million housing units for moderate- and middle-income families. That makes us the largest single supplier of funds for home mortgages.

Knowing that Fannie Mae is always there has created a foundation of confidence for the housing industry, providing needed stability in what had been a boom-or-bust business. During 1979, for example, Fannie Mae purchased $10.8 billion worth of mortgages, providing financing for more than 230,000 homes.




## THE BABY BOOM IS HOUSEHUNTING

Regardless of whether money is tight or easy, interest rates high or low, the demand for home financing will be increasing. The babies born during the post-war boom are ready for places of their own. Nearly 32 million Americans reached 30 years of age during the '70s. During the '80s, 42 million will reach this prime home-buying age.

Additional demands for mortgage funds will come from some new buyers in the housing market. Women who head households, the elderly and single people, for example. Minorities who had found opportunities scarce or non-existent now have the protection of the law to help them enjoy homeownership.

We believe that by always keeping our window open in the secondary mortgage market, Fannie Mae is also keeping the door open to homeownership for many Americans.

## WHAT IS FANNIE MAE?

Fannie Mae, the Federal National Mortgage Association, is a shareholder-owned corporation which helps meet people's housing needs by supplying money to the home mortgage industry. We purchase mortgages from local lenders, thereby replenishing their funds for further lending. Federal National Mortgage Association, 3900 Wisconsin Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016.

**FANNIE MAE** America's Mortgage Resource

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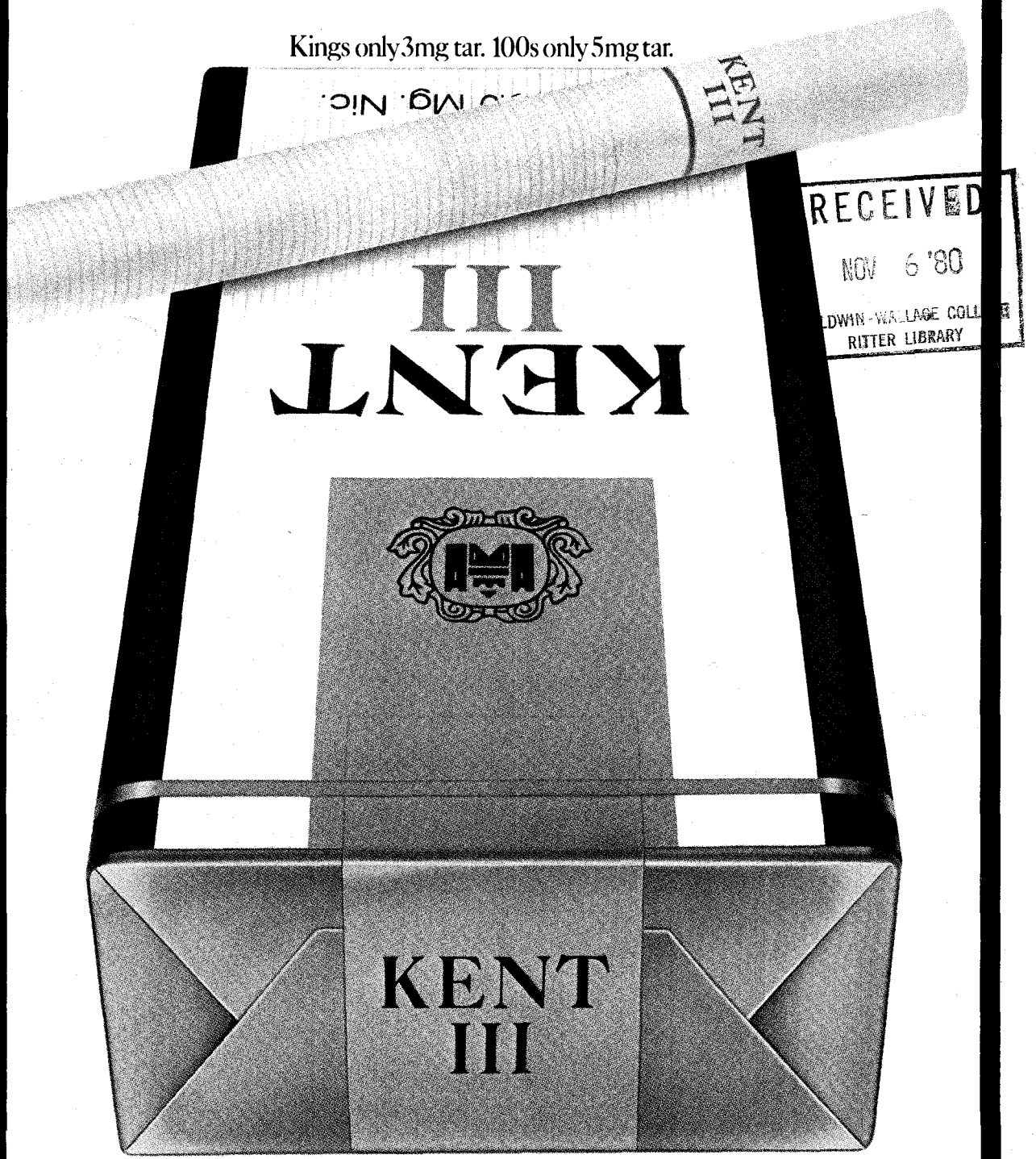


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